2/22/83

The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Volume 1, Number 6 *February* 1983

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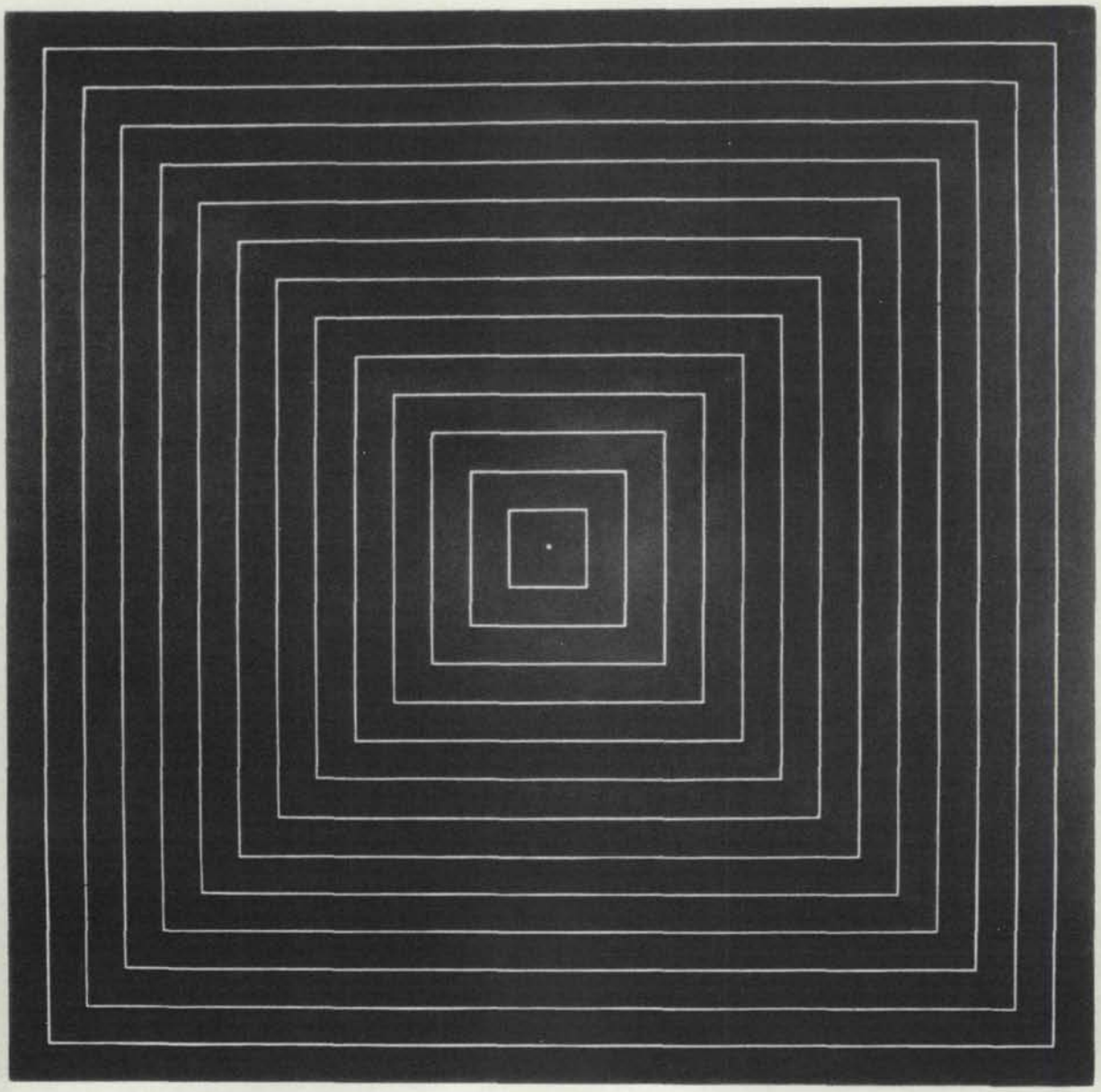

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Editor *Hilton Kramer*
Publisher *Samuel Lipman*
Managing Editor *Erich Eichman*
Assistant Managing Editor *Jeanne Wacker*
Business Manager *Robert Richman*
Technical Editor *Eva Szent-Miklosy*

Contributors to this issue

William C. Agee holds the Brown Fellowship at the Archives of American Art.

Stanislaw Barańczak's poetry has appeared most recently in *Hunts and Wings,* an anthology of Polish poetry written after 1968.

William Barrett's most recent book is *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals.*

Gail Buckland is the author of *Fox Talbot and the Invention of Photography,* among many other books.

Hortense Calisher's "The long, shining table" appeared in the January issue of *The New Criterion.*

Arthur A. Cohen's new novel, *An Admirable Woman,* will be published by David R. Godine later this year.

Frederick Crews is professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of *Out of My System: Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Critical Method.*

Joshua Gilder reviews fiction regularly for *The New Criterion.*

Mark Lilla is executive editor of *The Public Interest.*

Dana Mack is a doctoral candidate in history at Columbia University.

John Bernard Myers is at work on a volume of memoirs entitled *Tracking the Marvelous.* A biographical note appears on page ten of this issue.

Cynthia Ozick's most recent book is *Levitation,* a collection of stories.

Deborah Trustman has written for *The New York Times Magazine* and other publications.

Richard Wilbur's translation of Racine's *Andromache* was published last year.

Philip Winters will have two books on Wagner published this year: *Richard Wagner: Chronicle and Catalogue* (Faber & Faber) and *A Wagner Primer* (Simon & Schuster).

The New Criterion is published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 460 Park Avenue, NY 10022. Publication Number ISSN 0734-0222. February, 1983, Volume I, Number 6. Subscription rates: $27 for one year, $50 for two. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to P.O. Box 5194, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150.

Copyright © 1983 by The Foundation for Cultural Review.

Distributed in England by Periodicals in Particular, 1 Prince of Wales Passage, 117 Hampstead Road, London, NW1. Editorial/business correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 5194, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150. (212) 838-2033.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman and printed by the Eastern Press of New Haven, Connecticut.

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Pop goes the critic

by Frederick Crews

Leslie Fiedler we have always with us. For roughly two decades now he has been intellectually stagnant and muddled, prolifically redundant, obsessed with shoring up his ever more dubious fame, pitching one-liners to an empty house. It would be a kindness if he were to declare a moratorium on self-promotion, but nothing appears less likely. Indeed, in his twenty-second and most autobiographical book, *What Was Literature?,* he has made his most sustained effort yet to convince us that history is on his side.[1] Though the book leaves a quite opposite impression, there can be little hope that Fiedler will be deterred by the cold welcome it has already received. He is like a bag lady permanently camped on the doorstep of criticism, muttering imprecations at the insiders and keeping warm by waving enthusiastically to oblivious passers-by.

Part I of *What Was Literature?,* characteristically titled "Subverting the Standards," is Fiedler's retrospect on the years since World War II, with particular reference to his own part in the struggle between high and popular culture. We follow him from humble origins—proletarian-Jewish in Newark, then miserable in Missoula, having to pass for a fellow-traveler of WASP academic pretensions—through persecution and exile following the famous pot bust in Buffalo, to his present status as a living legend who is free to declare that his cultural affinities have been, all along, those of an impressionable teenager. And in Part II, "Opening Up the Canon," he argues that the popular tradition which he now wishes to champion has its own shelf of worthy classics—best-sellers whose lasting appeal rebukes the insufferable professors of literature who, throughout the book, play the bad guys arrayed against the Lone Fiedler.

Because Fiedler is more concerned to settle old scores than to think consecutively, his case for an American counter-canon is rather haphazardly assembled. His analyses of books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone With the Wind,* furthermore, read like parodies of the Fiedler method, with its abundant "archetypes" and stock figures and its loose way of arriving at titillating inferences. And his account of the cultural wars from the Fifties until now, though sometimes lively and frank, is vitiated by his need to score easy points off opponents who are identified only by denigrating epithets that settle their inferiority without the nuisance of debate.

Why bother to write about such a book? I have asked myself that question more than once. But there are two matters here that bear pausing over. In the first place, the latter half of *What Was Literature?* does raise a legitimate issue about the reasons why "perennial best-sellers" retain their appeal. If classics are known by their longevity, on what grounds can we deny that *Gone With*

1 *What Was Literature?: Class Culture and Mass Society,* Simon & Schuster, 260 pages, $14.95

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the Wind, say, is a classic? Fiedler at least challenges us to come up with an answer. And, more generally, Fiedler's memoirs, however self-serving, invite a reassessment of his whole career—a career whose direction he understands quite well but whose decade-by-decade claim on our interest he seems to have exactly backwards.

Such a reassessment would be a sterile exercise if Fiedler had not once been an important figure in our cultural life. But that is indeed what he was, most notably in his first three books: *An End to Innocence* (1955), *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), and *No! in Thunder* (1960). Throughout the Fifties he was considered the *enfant terrible* of American social and literary criticism—a reputation that, though he sought it out and cherished it, did less than justice to his actual contribution. Before the Sixties Fiedler was never simply a maverick; he was a cogent analyst of traits that he followed from the classics of our fiction through the political hypocrisies of his own time. His decline is more than an arresting case history; it is a commentary on the passing of a subculture that had encouraged a rare combination of literary and social engagement.

To begin seeing what has been lost, let me recall my own introduction to Fiedler, which occurred when I was a graduate student at Princeton and he was in fullest stride. The Gauss Seminar committee selected him as its annual lecturer for 1957—a controversial choice and, I imagine, a great comic opportunity for Fiedler. Princeton in those days was a coldbed of something called, in all ethnic obtuseness, "Christian Humanism," a peculiarly rigid conception of literary study which presumed that literary works were attempts to instruct us in commonplace verities of their authors' time. "Christian" referred broadly to the theological climate that was thought to have survived, *mutatis mutandis,* from the Beowulf poet through "Mr. Eliot," whose tonal influence was everywhere, though of course, being still alive, he was not yet a fit subject for a dissertation.

Into this churchly atmosphere breezed Fiedler, looking not a bit like an awestruck supplicant. Bearded, rotund, robust, ironically genial, eyes twinkling with wary merriment at the effect he was provoking, he lectured about classic American fiction and the *real* themes—misogyny, sadomasochism, sublimated homoeroticism, incest, necrophilia, and miscegenous rape—that had rescued our most cherished books from their sappy manifest content. This was the scandalous material that would be elaborated in *Love and Death in the American Novel,* that bumptious, mischievous tract which, as one of my Princeton professors would have remarked with an air of taking an exact measurement, "went too far"—but in a direction that badly needed to be taken.

The word about Fiedler in Princeton's corridors was that he was a barbarian—dirty-minded, sloppy with facts and theory, disrespectful of tradition. It was hard to disagree, but I remember feeling that this kick in the pants was just what Christian Humanism deserved. Those among us who harbored secret sympathies for "the critics" in their war against "the scholars"—that is, for clever and surprising verbal analysis as opposed to the prevailing blend of pedantry and cultural reverence—saw in Fiedler a potential ally. And though we did not realize it at once, he was supplying an exhilarating intellectual agenda for some of us who felt drawn toward the furtive, inhibited-demonic strain within an American civilization that was outwardly ruled by optimism and materialism. Is there an essential violence in our collective imagination? Are the American classics anti-female? Should we read those books not as plotted sermons but as testaments to ambivalence? To have broached such previously unthinkable questions, with or without fully convincing answers, was in itself a critical landmark.

Fiedler has by no means repented of the jolt he administered to American studies, yet his present rhetorical purpose requires that his best decade of work—when he still cared about literary quality and had not yet turned his mythifying into a methodological tic—

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be passed over lightly. Instead, he calls our attention to his most conformist period in the Forties, when, we learn, he cut his teeth on Brooks and Warren, wrote his first long paper on Hopkins's verse, produced an orthodox dissertation on "The Medieval Backgrounds of John Donne's 'Songs and Sonnets,'" and accepted without question the professorial consensus about "first-rank" literature and "the canon" of great American fiction. That was the hero bound and gagged with old school ties. In the "after" picture we are to discern someone who is free at last from the imposed role of "culture-climbing Jewish boy" or imitation WASP.

While this account is true enough to Fiedler's current sense of himself, it leaves us wondering why his reputation has continued to rest almost entirely on work that was complete by 1960. Such books as *Waiting for the End* (1964) and *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968), presumably written in a more liberated state, sound by comparison like amiable chitchat, animated by no more urgent purpose than to catalogue some themes and to lay some personal blessings and curses on recent literature. Fiedler in those years was beginning not only to repeat himself and to coast on his notoriety but also to lose the moral incisiveness that had spared his early work from being merely sensationalistic.

Now, "moral incisiveness" may sound like an unnecessarily stuffy compliment to pay the critic who is thought to have tried, in "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!," to make us believe that the major American novelists of the mid-nineteenth century were closet homosexuals. But in fact Fiedler's essay made no such claim. Its actual subject was white racial guilt and the outlet it finds in a pathetic dream of remission. Given the persistence of bigotry, Fiedler proposed, the races can be reconciled only symbolically, through a fantasy of chaste, boyish love between a white nonconformist (Natty, Ishmael, Huck) and his black or red companion in adventure. Fiedler blamed our national "nostalgia for the infantile" on the bad faith and escapism of the dominant whites:

> In each generation we *play out* the impossible mythos, and we live to see our children play it: the white boy and the black we can discover wrestling affectionately on any American sidewalk, along which they will walk in adulthood, eyes averted from each other, unwilling to touch even by accident. The dream recedes; the immaculate passion and the astonishing reconciliation become a memory, and less, a regret, at last the unrecognized motifs of a child's book. "It's too good to be true, Honey," Jim says to Huck. "It's too good to be true."

Here is the prose of a man with something more important on his mind than his own self-image or his ability to ferret out prurient themes; his analytic powers remain in the service of his sense of humanity and justice.

That same sense also informs Fiedler's once controversial political essays from the Fifties, notably "Hiss, Chambers, and the Age of Innocence," "Afterthoughts on the Rosenbergs," and "McCarthy and the Intellectuals." Those pieces have so often been denounced for unseemly red-baiting that one hesitates to cite their virtues. Admittedly, no great courage was needed in the McCarthy years to chide liberals for having deceived themselves about the Soviet Union. Yet Fiedler was not in fact leaping onto an ideological bandwagon. He was holding his fellow intellectuals accountable to their consciences and doing so through richly persuasive analysis of events and public personalities. What strikes one on reacquaintance with his political writing is the openness and alertness of the sensibility it displays—at once tough, engaged, empathetic, and fair.

The vigor of that sensibility can be explained in part by reference to Fiedler's most immediate audience in the Fifties. In appealing to an ideal reader who would be skeptical, liberal, humane, and cosmopolitan, the early Fiedler was also addressing a

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circle of real readers whose approval he strove to earn. I mean the so-called New York intellectuals—those mostly Jewish literary and social critics who, in the Forties and Fifties, were beating a dignified retreat from their former leftism. When Fiedler argued for artistic integrity, judged American literature to be "immature" by European standards, and skewered both the know-nothings of the Right and the sentimentalists of the Left, he was emulating such *Partisan Review* elders as Philip Rahv and Lionel Trilling. Emulating, but by no means parroting, for while Trilling was wont to vaporize and Rahv was given to peremptory, defensive, bullying pronouncements, Fiedler was nearly always shrewd, concrete, and implicitly democratic in his sympathies.

In retrospect, we can see that the "adversary culture" of the *Partisan* circle owed its existence to a unique moment in American social and political history. The discrediting of Stalinism, the emergence of the United States as custodian *pro tempore* of a shattered European civilization, and the weakening of class and ethnic barriers after the Depression all helped to coax would-be revolutionaries into uneasy reconciliation with capitalism and nativism. In that reconciliation, the old anti-bourgeois impetus survived in derivative forms: as an advocacy of international literary modernism and of "difficulty" generally, as an insistence on tragedy and irony as opposed to middle-class shallowness, as a suspicion of dogma in whatever form. Both the pretensions and the accomplishments of the New York intellectuals, then, reflected the conflicting claims of assimilation and exclusivity in a period of political realignment and widening social opportunity.

In order to understand what happened to Fiedler in the Sixties and thereafter, it is essential to grasp that he was a *second-generation* participant in the adversary culture, one who had barely flirted with Communism and whose arena from the outset was the semi-bureaucratic world of the literary academy. Thus he experienced none of the anxiety that older New York intellectuals felt about losing their vanguard status when they were belatedly welcomed into the universities. For them, as Fiedler points out in *What Was Literature?,* the essential thing was to continue exposing provincialism and kitsch. Though they had no reason to trust the clubby Anglophiles of the English departments, they also had no fundamental quarrel with the idea that literary education should be elitist in spirit. But for Fiedler, a self-described "Jewish-American academic arriviste," things were significantly different. In his world the anti-Semitic professors, the connoisseurs of beauties in Keats and Pater, were the gatekeepers to success. He had to start out by playing their game—and, for self-respect, by undermining it in every way that would not jeopardize his toehold in the academy.

Fiedler's *Partisan* predecessors had approached literary problems with the solemn urgency of men who had lost a secular faith and who wanted to balance a cutting-edge skepticism against a need for order and certitude. The Freud and Marx whom they somewhat airily invoked were not just presences that could help them withdraw from Trotsky to Kafka without appearing to stumble. They were also thought to be repositories of hard-won knowledge about mass repression and false consciousness—knowledge, in short, of the modern soul and the enduring human condition. But Fiedler had no desire to traffic in such woolly abstractions. Since his primary aim was to upstage his academic colleagues, he would avail himself of Marxian and Freudian concepts, along with those of the seemingly antithetical Jung, in an ad hoc, opportunistic spirit, knowing but not caring, as he said in the preface to *Love and Death in the American Novel,* "how syncretically I have yoked together and how cavalierly I have transformed my borrowings."

Already in the Fifties, it is clear, Fiedler's egoism and theatricality were chafing to break free from the purposes he shared with the New York intellectuals. And from the outset he was never steadied by the univer-

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sity's ideals of patient research, objectivity, and deference to pertinent work by other scholars. For him those ideals would always be tainted by their association with the old guard of the Modern Language Association. Although that old guard disappeared long ago, in Fiedler's mind the academy would always remain a bastion of WASP privilege. He could therefore conceive of himself only as an enemy agent within its walls.

We can see, then, that Fiedler was well primed for the gestural radicalism that was to blossom in the later Sixties. By the time that Trilling-style liberalism had lost its cachet in the Vietnam era, Fiedler no longer had any stake in it. When high culture came under attack as an instrument of social control, he was ready to declare that he had never really believed in it—that only protective mimicry had prompted him, for example, to condemn the Beat writers "in the court of high art for flagrant immorality, an immorality of form." And when a generation of college students sided with "the people" against "the establishment," Fiedler could claim to have been there first. Although his idea of "the people" was the very middle class against whom the Haydens and the Rubins were rebelling, Fiedler already shared the activists' taste for simplistic contrasts between the oppressors and the oppressed.

It is not surprising, then, in turning to *What Was Literature?,* to discover that Fiedler's sociopolitical observations no longer show any regard for fairness or nuance. By now he thinks nothing of slandering the New Critics as "proto-fascist"; of fingering Saul Bellow as "a spokesman for the New Right, vilifying the young, blacks and insubordinate women"; and of hinting that *Huckleberry Finn* and the unbowdlerized Mother Goose rhymes are no longer available to the young. In a society which happens to be discarding taboos rapidly without any prompting from himself, Fiedler has chosen to depict the Eighties as "our own repressive decade," a time when the retreat from the First Amendment "threatens to turn into a rout." His conception of himself as an embattled liberationist, a Gang of One in the cause of cultural democracy, comes first; actualities must be adjusted to fit the picture.

The same need to represent himself as surrounded by villains now manifests itself in Fiedler's assessment of the English departments, which in his rendering are still bent upon suppressing all things popular and anti-modernist. We must not be lulled, he warns, by the fact that his favorite genres —science fiction, the detective story, the cowboy movie, the soap opera, pornography—have found their way into many a curriculum. He insists that the specialists in popular culture are still being treated as pariahs within their departments. Besides, he says, the mandarins are stubbornly unwilling to relinquish their "last and dearest snobbism, the conviction that print is inherently superior to movies and TV. . . ." If teachers of literature are to satisfy Fiedler that they are true sons of liberty, they will have to get over their atavistic preference for books. At the very least they must avoid "even the semblance of celebrating already established works at the expense of those still despised, much less those preferred by an elite at the expense of those loved by the great majority."

Fiedler labors mightily to convince us, and perhaps himself as well, that he feels right at home with the taste of that "vast majority." Within the literary tradition he favors Stephen Foster over Emily Dickinson and finds redeeming virtues in "The Bells" and in the poems of Longfellow, whose "Hiawatha," he notes, was "a smash hit" in 1855. He proudly lays claim to having written the first highbrow defense of *Superman* comics and to having extolled hard-core pornography and Grade B movies before their merits had become apparent to other intellectuals. He can testify, further, that he weeps copiously over daytime serials and responds "passionately" to the triumphs of Tarzan. And with what he himself calls a "truly Dickensian sentimentality," he invites the rest of us to join him in embracing

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"what used to be called 'trash,' . . . [which] touches us all at a place where we have never been psychically sundered each from each."

Halfway through his book, however, Fiedler lets us see what he really thinks of the people and their literary preferences. There the great commoner suddenly lashes out at "the ersatz mystical maunderings of Kahlil Gibran" and "the vapid rhapsodies of Rod McKuen," which apparently exemplify the wrong, or truly trashy, variety of trash. Eventually Fiedler confesses that he is offended by the "majoritarian tyranny" of "the most ill-educated and naïve." "I do not believe," he announces, ". . . that even in an open society like our own everyone is entitled to establish his own rank order of books based on personal preference, whether these lead him to rate *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* higher than *Huckleberry Finn* or vice versa." Fiedler too turns out to believe in a canon—to believe, that is, that "some literary works are better than others, which is to say, more moving, more lasting in their appeal."

What, then, has all the fuss been about in Part I of *What Was Literature?* Fiedler seems gravely confused between his allegiance to "the great novels of our own tradition" and his need to identify with the mass audience. But the contradiction becomes less mysterious when we recall that Fiedler's aesthetic egalitarianism derives, not from untutored responses, but from his continuing vendetta against the genteel professors who once exacted from him a betrayal of his ethnic and class identity. The yearned-for regressive paradise, the "place where we have never been psychically sundered each from each," is not just childhood; it is a *pre-academic* condition antedating the fall into WASP sophistication.

As the not-yet-populist Fiedler himself remarked in 1958, when "the New York intellectual in academia" concentrates on popular literature and affects to "prefer a standard Hollywood Western to an 'art film,'" he is displaying "an inverted snobbism, a resistance to culture-mongering." In this light, the present fan of *Tarzan* is not so distant from the professor who scorns "the most ill-educated and naïve." One Fiedler tries to repudiate the tastemaking authority of the academic overlords, the other to preempt their disapproval of him by merging into their company.

But what happens to the self-respect of a thinker whose fixations have left him with only clashing fragments of an identity? None of his provisional roles, we may imagine, will supply him with the confidence he enjoyed when he felt himself, however marginally, to be a member of a coherent community. His one remaining hope must be to make himself a favorite of those masses he has pretended to admire. If they will give their affection only to a clown who can amuse them by thumbing his nose at the cultural establishment—why, then, he will try his hand at being a clown.

There was a time, two decades ago, when Fiedler apparently sensed such an imminent change in his self-conception and cried out against it. "I am a literary man," he warned in *An End to Innocence,* "immune to certain journalistic platitudes"; and in *No! in Thunder* he protested that "I am not, let it be clear, for all my occasional hamminess, an entertainer." But that was 1960. Today, in *What Was Literature?,* Fiedler tells us that "like other entertainers I have been paid to allay boredom—in my case, by making our country and our culture seem more interesting and amusing than most academic accounts would lead us to believe." Now he sees himself as a would-be media star, eager to play the "visiting 'nut'" on television talk shows by twitting the critical stuffed shirts and by parading his affinity for the freakish.

In his own estimation, then, Fiedler is now a performer with an act to keep booked. And like anyone else in show business, he has had to cope with a fickle public. Television, he confesses, "ran out for me after a while"; but since he had never felt entirely comfortable with "the three-, four-, or five-minute shticks television format demands," he was glad enough to return to the college lecture circuit, where, "[t]hough I have not

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struck it quite as rich as Humboldt, I have been doing all right." "I am not only paid for public performance," Fiedler confides, "but I get free books for which other people pay hard cash, and am invited to attend without paying admission plays and movies for which others must buy tickets at the box office." What does it matter, asks the man who once disclosed a general "failure of the moral imagination" in leftists and rightists alike, if his sponsors have included both the CIA and the Writers Union of Rumania? The show must go on.

When we get to Part II of *What Was Literature?,* however, we find that Fiedler the earnest literary critic is still alive if far from well. There he eases up on the mugging and assembles a reasoned, though revealingly flawed, argument about the merits of certain popular works that the mass audience continues to find compelling. Here at last is Fiedler's bid to reassert his tarnished authority as a student of American literary history.

The pop classics Fiedler scrutinizes are *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s, *The Clansman* and D. W. Griffith's adaptation of it, *Birth of a Nation*; *Gone With the Wind,* the novel and film alike; and, somewhat prematurely it would seem, Alex Haley's *Roots* as both book and television series. Though these works, according to Fiedler, are despised by the fussy professors of literature, they meet the professors' own criterion of durability. They do so, moreover, without being notably complex or verbally distinguished. As Fiedler points out, the perennial best-seller may have been collaboratively written or even plagiarized, and it is so little beholden to excellence of language that it can actually gain in power when transposed to other media. What is the secret of its allure?

The puzzle is not necessarily very profound. If he had merely pursued the fact that works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Gone With the Wind* belong to a mixed genre, at once romantic and realistic, Fiedler could have gone far to explain their resilience. Such books give us the easy thrills of romance while assuring us, through an admixture of candid, sometimes brutal details, that our daydreams pertain to the harsh actual world. And their moral narrowness makes them more accessible to the unreflective reader than are doubt-riddled works like *The Scarlet Letter* and *Billy Budd.* It is a luxury to share in the Southern belle's glamour *and* her deserved fall, to stand in judgment of her personal failings while accepting her (and her creator's) politically childish grasp of the larger world. The romantic-realistic best-seller allows us to believe that life is both unbearable and wonderful, just and unjust, heroic and base; we are never put to the trouble of trying to hold the extremes within a single tragic, ironic, or satirical apprehension.

For Fiedler to adopt this line of reasoning, however, would be to forfeit his game of overturning the professors' canon. That game calls for a transvaluation of values: the pop classics must come out looking *better* than works of idiosyncratic genius. And since those classics are at least partly sentimental in outlook and technique, this means that Fiedler must discover an innate virtue in what he once called, in *An End to Innocence,* "the ersatz religion of sentimentalism."

But where is such virtue to be found? Clearly, the sentimental dream of the harmonious, monogamous, all-white household is of small interest to a man of Fiedler's thematic preoccupations. Again, while Fiedler still identifies himself with books that "call into question our fundamental assumptions about men and God," the essence of the sentimental is that it generates a maximum of bittersweet emotion while calling as little as possible into question. (Even slavery, as Fiedler acknowledges, escapes condemnation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*) And of course sentimental fiction is regularly prudish, euphemistic, and trite—not hearty fare, one would think, for the imperturbable author of *Freaks.*

Fiedler's means of escaping this dilemma is typically bluff and reckless. He simply tells us that he was wrong when, back in 1960, he declared that for the novelist, ineptitude

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is the one unforgivable sin. Verbal talent, it now transpires, is quite beside the point; it may even impede the mythic power that shines through the great popular novel. And that power does not emerge in spite of sentimental clichés of plotting and portraiture but because of them. As Fiedler proclaims with a flourish of self-conscious hokum, "in every stereotype, no matter how weary, there sleeps a true archetype, waiting to be awakened by the majority critic, who, like the majority poet or novelist, screenwriter or composer of popular songs, dares to be simple enough, sentimental enough, passionate enough, absurd enough to try."

Fiedler's response to the timid domestic ideals of sentimental fiction is equally bold. Properly understood, he explains, that fiction is really a species of pornography, since it "impel[s] us toward some kind of orgasmic release." This, of course, is exactly the opposite of what sentimental novels appear to do, but Fiedlerian depth analysis puts us in contact with primordial themes lying beneath the fig leaf of altruism and decorum. Thus we learn that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is gripping because it pulsates with symbolic rape, while *Gone With the Wind* is "essentially sadomasochistic."

As for Mrs. Stowe's cloying hearthside morality, a little methodological ingenuity can send it out into the storm. If Stowe is female, Fiedler reasons, she must of course be anti-male. Thus the two exemplars of "black phallic power" who flank Simon Legree as he beats Tom to death are really "projections of a misandry otherwise difficult for a dutiful wife, sister and daughter of strong pious males to confess." Similarly, the novel gets more interesting when we realize that "metaphorically, mythically, Tom is female and white"—an identification that leads to many a penetrating inference until we are told, some pages later, that Tom is in fact "the Great Black Mother of us all."

Now, this sort of capriciousness has marred Fiedler's criticism ever since he first grasped that he could import the concepts of repression and sublimation whenever a text looked recalcitrant to his hobbyhorses. Yet over the years an ominous difference has set in. Originally, as we have seen, Fiedler's meditations about the American "archetypes" of racial and sexual bigotry were framed by his avowed liberalism and his neo-Freudian concern for "maturity" in fiction. The idea was that our national literature has *suffered from* an ingrained racism and misogyny that issue in symptomatic polarities: the virgin and the whore, the kindly slave or noble Indian and the foe of white womanhood, the flight into prissy "values" on the one hand and into homoerotic, pre-adolescent male companionship on the other. Before long, however, those themes had become, not marks of a condition that might yet be rectified, but simply Fiedler's stock-in-trade as a traveling salesman of his own reputation. As they did so, Fiedler gradually forgot about "maturity" and social progress and began locating literary merit directly in the "archetypes." The result is a critical mode that could be fairly named redneck-mythic.

Mrs. Stowe, Fiedler now declares approvingly, "was what we call nowadays a 'racist,' which is to say, one who believes that whites and blacks are intrinsically different." The quotation marks are eloquent, as they are again in the following complaint against fellow critics: "they feel free to denounce [Thomas] Dixon [Jr.] for his 'misrepresentation' of slavery and the Negro, or to scold Margaret Mitchell for the 'falsity' of her account of the rise of the Klan."

"The form of a book," Fiedler wrote long ago, "represents either a moral critique of man and society, or a moral surrender." Somewhat later, applying that yardstick, he characterized *The Clansman* as perhaps "the worst book ever written in our country, an inept and hysterical piece of anti-Negro propaganda." If he now holds a different view, it is not because he has evolved into a racist. Rather, having deserted the *Partisan* critics' values and replaced them with nothing but a star-struck worship of success, he hesitates to object to any widely popular author's purposes. It seems that sheer audience excitement—as in the lynch-thirsty

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chase scenes in *Birth of a Nation*—lays to rest any questions about art in the service of race hatred.

Fiedler becomes uneasy only when confronting a work that is *not* suffused with plantation envy. What can he say about *Roots*? Well, to begin with, he can call it an "anti-anti-Tom book" and sportingly designate its author a "'good good nigger.'" So much for the main mythic coordinates. But how could millions of white Americans have been entranced by an account of slavery written from the *slaves'* point of view? Could this be a sign of better understanding between the races? On the contrary, Fiedler assures us that *Roots* succeeded through orthodox means, by offering "images of black-white atrocities," by portraying sexual passion as "essentially evil," and by reactivating that guaranteed crowd pleaser, miscegenation horror. Once it is regarded in this light, we can suppose that Haley's book appears worthy after all to join *The Clansman* on the shelf of pop immortals.

There is no need to attach sinister importance to the strange political tenor of Fiedler's latest criticism. He continues to perform his eccentric version of deep thematic analysis, not because he cares where it comes out, but simply because he thinks his public expects him to run through a certain repertoire of interpretive stunts. The thesis he really cares about is that he is still the great Leslie Fiedler—still a rebel, a myth doctor, a man of the people, a kid at heart. It is a message he evidently needs to hear, and so, no doubt, he will go on repeating it. Meanwhile, some of us will prefer our recollections of the early Fiedler—the one who argued so trenchantly against escapism in every guise and who still believed that aesthetic and ethical standards, not gross sales, are the proper measure of an author's excellence.

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Mark Rothko & the Rothko case: notes, memories, observations

by John Bernard Myers

[*Prefatory note: In September 1944 I had the good fortune to be hired as the managing editor of* View, *a magazine devoted to European artists—particularly the Surrealists and neo-Romantics—then in exile in New York. Until the magazine folded in 1947 I was acquainted with Miró, Ernst, Matta, Lam, Seligmann, Tchelitchew, Berman, and many of the other European expatriate artists, their dealers, and their surrounding circle.* View *was concerned with both art and literature, and numbered among its contributors Meyer Schapiro, Paul Goodman, Marius Bewley, Harold Rosenberg, Parker Tyler, Lionel Abel, and Edouard Roditi. It was probably the first American journal to publish in translation the poetry and prose of such writers as Francis Ponge, Jean Genet, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, André Breton, Jorge Luis Borges, and other contemporaries since become celebrated.*

In 1951 I organized a gallery to exhibit new work by young American artists, the so-called "second generation" that followed in the wake of the Abstract Expressionists. I had been encouraged to do this by Clement Greenberg, Jackson Pollock, and Lee Krasner, and received further support from such artists as Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Adolph Gottlieb, with all of whom I was friendly. At the time there were perhaps a half dozen galleries willing to gamble on unknown American artists.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Tibor De Nagy Gallery (named after my partner) exhibited many painters who have since become well known: Larry Rivers, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Goodnough, Jane Freilicher, and Red Grooms, to name only a few. The gallery followed no aesthetic ideology and was hospitable to both abstract and representational work. It was the first to exhibit the Minimalists and Color-field artists. No one knew what would be next on the program. The gallery published new poetry by Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest, sent out a broadside called Semi-colon, *and collaborated with the Artists Theater. As a result, the gallery became a center for what was then called the New York School.*

It must be remembered that the art world was very small at that time; everyone knew everyone else.—J. B. M.]

From my journal: November 1959

Mark Rothko stopped by the gallery to see the Ralph Humphrey show, since Ralph is the roommate of his close friend Theodoros Stamos. It was cold, a bit snow-flurry outside, Mark, pink of cheek, entered the gallery like a hearty Russian coach driver who has just driven his *troika* for twenty *versts*. I almost wished I had a steaming samovar and could say, "Won't you have a glass of *tchai*?" for the pleasure of watching Mark drink his tea through a cube of sugar held between his teeth. There was a mischievous gleam in his eye as he said, "I understand that the man who runs a fleet of taxis was in trying to buy a Humphrey." Obviously Stamos had repeated my story of Robert

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Scull. "Humphrey has some talent, wouldn't you say?" asked Mark. "Would I have shown him had I not thought so?" was my reply.

Mark sat down, smoking a cigarette out of the corner of his mouth. It is difficult to capture exactly the tone of his speech. He has, for instance, the faintest of accents, neither foreign nor domestic; sometimes I think it must be an intonation from the state of Oregon where he grew up. Sometimes I think it is an echo from Minsk or Pinsk or wherever his Russian-Jewish ancestors came from. He then launched into a diatribe against collectors.

I, who depend upon the good will of collectors to keep my gallery going, find it difficult to understand the anger of certain artists toward their patrons. David Hare, the sculptor, for instance, told his dealer Sam Kootz that not only did he *not* want to meet the buyers of his works, he did not even want to know their names. With Mark the anger is more pronounced. He is convinced that collectors are exploiters, that they buy works of art to enrich their pocketbooks and social position, that they have the instinct of vultures, and that their deepest feelings are based on the joy of mere possession. He believes that their most dangerous attribute is caprice; the capricious need to be *au courant*. If all this is so, then the artist had best be wary of them and make it as difficult as possible for them to acquire serious work. "Who knows," he asked, "when, at what moment, any one of them is apt to become bored with a single painting or all of them? What happens to the painting? Usually the miserable embarrassment of the auction block, the hellish fumes of Parke-Bernet." Mark shuddered, then added: "I particularly loathe people like"—he mentioned two well-known collectors of contemporary art. "Both of them think they are greater than artists," he said. "Both of them are self-satisfied because they are so rich, and neither of them knows anything about art."

"Alas," I finally said after a respectful silence, "can any artist ever know the fate of his work?" It seems to me that the future of almost any movable work of art is totally problematic.

"Quite true," agreed Mark. "But the artist can make it as difficult as possible. That is why I would rather teach and scrounge for money than sell paintings. I sell as few as I possibly can."

Rothko had come to his career as an artist in a rather roundabout fashion. He had originally, as a youth, been an actor in Seattle in a stock company where Clark Gable had been the leading man. Mark, too, had wanted to be a leading man, but had had to settle for "character" roles. My friend Herbert Machiz and I both liked to hear him talk about his dear friend Irene Worth and what a great actress she was and how he tried never to miss any of her openings. I think Herbert was the one person to whom Mark enjoyed confiding his love of the theater and his frustration with acting. He felt comfortable with Herbert because Herbert never brought up his professional life as a painter. Herbert made it clear without saying much that his admiration for Mark's work was continuing and unfaltering.

It was actually Arshile Gorky who talked Mark out of making the rounds to professional offices and auditions and into becoming a painter instead. This happened at the Blue Ribbon in the West Forties. He and Gorky went there often because it offered a free lunch if you bought a glass of beer. Both of them were very poor. Mark had a cold-water flat on Sixth Avenue, a walk-up.

From my journal: February 1967

The series of large mural-like canvases which Rothko was to have sold for installation in one of the rooms in Mies van der Rohe's new building at 375 Park Avenue were precipitously withdrawn. Mark says he's decorating no Philip Johnson restaurants.

Mark Rothko was never interested in galleries or dealers. He went from Peggy Guggenheim to Betty Parsons to Sidney Janis, rarely showing after 1958 and then not for

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several years. It would be difficult to say precisely what motivated Rothko's reticence. Had he seen too many reputations rise and fall because of overexposure? Was it his distrust of collectors and museums? Or did he feel his work was too valuable to allow easy access to it? At any rate, his stance began to change after his second child, Christopher, was born and his first, Kate, started to grow up. He had purchased a large town house on East Ninety-fifth Street and had taken over a huge studio in a carriage house on East Sixty-ninth Street, opposite Hunter College. People wondered how he managed. But no artist in New York was better at managing—Mark was a shrewd businessman who could never be "taken." Having lived a tough life, he was what is called "street smart."

I first got to know Rothko's wife Mel when she and Mark were living together in their flat on Sixth Avenue. She seemed to me then and later a bit of a Midwesterner, the girl from Ohio who spoke with vaguely flat *a*'s. Only one thing struck me as odd: that she never called Mark by his first name, she always referred to him as Rothko. I thought this was some old-fashioned Jewish trait, the way very old Jewish ladies refer to their husbands by their last names. It is possible it was said with some kind of irony.

Although I always thought Mel a little spaced-out and could never seem to connect with her, she was awfully good-looking and I could quite see why Mark doted on her. She had a way of being there and yet not being there, surely tantalizing for someone as ardent as Mark. By the way, it was in the Sixth Avenue flat that Mark said—when I remarked that his pictures were too big for the rooms they were living in—"Not at all. Big pictures are perfect for small New York apartments. They make them seem larger." But what about furniture, I asked. "Get rid of it. Pictures first, furniture second." I must admit he was right. Eliza Parkinson always kept a big space in front of her Rothko and it did wonders for the room.

It must have been hard to be the wife of so large and urgent a personality as Mark. He could not temporize, and compromise of any sort was anathema to him. To be loved by such a man must have been almost suffocating—Mark did not do things in fractions.

Therefore I was disappointed but not really surprised when in 1968 I mentioned to Mark that I had heard that he was *living* in his studio on Sixty-ninth Street. He said that things were not going too well at home and he had moved into his studio. Somebody who came into the gallery told me that Mel had a serious drinking problem and was spending a good deal of time with her "shrink." It was hard for me to put that together with the Mel I first knew. I was shocked when in 1971, while in Munich, I heard from Herbert of Mel's sudden death six months after Mark's. I had seen Mel just before I went to Europe at a party given by Rose Slivka for all the contributors to *Craft Horizons* magazine. Mel seemed all right, a little vague perhaps, but in fairly good condition. She appeared to drink very little at the party, but alcohol was a factor in her death.

One of Rothko's closest friends, and one who helped him a great deal during his period of domestic difficulty was Theodoros Stamos. Stamos would be named by Rothko an executor of his estate—a mixed blessing indeed, considering what was to follow. I first met Stamos at the end of 1939. I was visiting New York and staying on East Twentieth Street with Nancy Wilder, who lived three doors east of Amadée Ozenfant's school. At that time it was the fashion to study with Ozenfant. Robert Goodnough studied with him, another painter, Sari Dienes, was very much an Ozenfant disciple and lived in nearby Irving Place. Sari Dienes had her own circle of young painters around her, one of whom was Stamos, occasionally called Ted but usually referred to as "Stammie." He was only about nineteen at the time. He had studied sculpture at the American Artists School on Fourteenth Street—formerly the John Reed Club. The Young Communist League people were sponsors of the school. The poor of the area,

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the Lower East Side, were encouraged to study there, and many did.

Stamos came from the poorest of the poor. His parents were Greek immigrants of working-class origin who had literally fought for their own survival and that of their children. Stamos eventually found painting more congenial than sculpture and was encouraged by friends to become a painter. At about the time we met, Stamos had gone uptown to the Wakefield Bookstore where he had heard there was a small gallery in the rear of the store managed by a Mrs. Betty Parsons. After Mrs. Parsons had scrutinized Stamos's work she suggested that he enter the ranks of her gallery. Stamos was one of the first of the celebrated Parsons discoveries.

Stamos was, of course, delighted. He had found his vocation and he never departed from it, although much later he would teach occasionally at the Art Students League and elsewhere. Few people have realized how young Stamos was when he first showed his work. His contemporaries among the gradually emerging Abstract Expressionist group were older than he, some by as many as twenty years.

Although he mellowed somewhat as he grew older, in his twenties Stamos was apt to lose his temper more quickly than he should have, and his manners were sometimes appalling. He could be tactless in the name of candor and very rude when vexed. On the other hand, he had a great sense of humor and could quickly see the funny side of people and situations. No doubt because of a profound dislike of poverty developed in early boyhood, Stammie also had a tendency to parsimoniousness; his frugality could sometimes be hilarious. Again, this was balanced by a capacity for unusual kindness, especially with friends or even acquaintances who were ill or in trouble. Students responded warmly to the generosity of spirit he could display in regard to whatever talent they might have, and he was often helpful in advising them how to solve problems both artistic and personal.

Shortly after the war, in 1946, Stamos met and became deeply attached to the poet Robert Price. Price had been stationed in Japan for many months and was an enthusiast of Japanese culture, especially Japanese poetry and painting. On his return to America he joined with his friends Ruth and John Stephan to publish a quarterly called *The Tiger's Eye,* an elegant, beautifully printed review which became the "voice" of the emerging Abstract Expressionists, in particular of the artists, poets, and intellectuals who frequented the Betty Parsons Gallery.

Not long after they met, Stamos and Price decided to share an apartment on West Eighty-third Street, where they lived until Price's death in 1954 at the age of thirty-six. The friendship was a turning point for Stamos—for both his painting and his personality. Price was as gentle, courteous, and reticent as Stamos was extroverted, rough-and-ready, and often rude. Stamos's social horizons in the art world widened and he became friends in quick succession with Adolph Gottlieb, Rothko, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, Pollock, Motherwell, and the rest of the artists of the new persuasion. Although Stamos had been close to the architect (and later sculptor) Tony Smith, as well as to the painter Milton Avery, both of whom he had met in 1944, Price now became the strongest influence on Stamos.

Stamos's earliest work had been largely concerned with what was referred to as biomorphic images, which did *not* come from Miró, as many people believed, but were simply the forms he himself had observed at the oceanside—jellyfish, crabs, starfish, and other marine creatures. Avery had taught Stamos the way in which such elusive forms could be pulled together. (It is well to remember that Avery influenced many young American painters who were searching for simplicity and clarity.) It was Price, however, who introduced Stamos to the Orient, showing him an art that was strong yet elusive. Price also pointed the way to a use of color that would release the lyricism which was the essential quality of Stamos's vision and—contrary to his personality—his innermost need.

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The friendship between Stamos and Mark Rothko picked up momentum about a year after their meeting. By 1948 the two of them were exchanging ideas and know-how daily; both visited each other's studio regularly. Stamos was moving away from his biomorphic imagery, Rothko was abandoning the "mythic" image and tending towards fields of color.

Robert Price had sustained a serious injury to his right arm during the war. It had been pulled out of the shoulder socket in an accident and would regularly lose its placement, causing him severe pain. It was this, perhaps, which was a contributing cause to his sudden and fatal heart attack, which occurred in 1954. Stamos was with Price at the moment it happened, and the shock was so severe that his friends Violet and Helen Mendelsohn, worried that the trauma might be lasting, did their best to ease the situation. Mark Rothko, likewise, was supportive.

Stamos did not recover quickly. At first he would see no one except Mark and the Mendelsohn sisters. Then he began to drink, which he did heavily. Work was impossible, and the situation lasted about a year. When at last he seemed to be coming to, Stamos went into a panic and did something that caused Betty Parsons to break with him. It can be easily understood that Stamos occupied a special place in Betty Parsons's affections; he had been with her since the old Wakefield gallery, and he had been like an adopted child, a member of the family. They never spoke again, and the separation was clearly a source of misery for both of them.

After Stamos's break with Betty Parsons, Mark Rothko began to occupy another position in Stamos's life. There was a twenty-two-year age difference between them. Rothko began to act rather like a father—helpful, sympathetic, encouraging. Telephone calls, studio visits were, throughout the year except for summer, daily and uninterrupted. Rothko's career began to ascend; Stamos would have good periods, but intermittently. There was a clear-cut dependency of each on the other. They never moped, since neither of them was in any way an "underachiever." Later, when Mark's domestic life became unbearably unhappy, it was Stamos who did what he could to pick up the pieces.

Ironically, it was Stamos, along with Donald McKinney of the Marlborough Gallery, who discovered Mark's body on February 26, 1970. They had a nine A.M. appointment with Mark. Donald was to select twenty-five or thirty pictures which would represent Mark at his best in European exhibitions. The studio door was open and they entered. Mark was not in the main workroom and they went into the kitchen, thinking to find him there. Mark was on the floor in a pool of blood. He had slit his arms and wrists with a sharp instrument, probably six or eight hours previously. Stamos let out a cry and became so ill that a few hours later he had to be hospitalized.

Donald McKinney went to the telephone and called the police. He then called the Marlborough Gallery and Bernard Reis, Rothko's accountant and close friend. After the police arrived they closed the building. When the detectives arrived (it having been quickly learned that a celebrated artist was the suicide in question), they told Donald that all works of art must be moved to a police warehouse for safekeeping. Donald knew the kind of careful handling Rothko's pictures required and he insisted that everything remain in place until properly inventoried. The police finally agreed to this measure and assigned watchmen.

Perhaps the hardest thing for Donald to face was informing Mel and preventing either of the children from stopping by. Rita Reinhardt—Ad Reinhardt's widow—did arrive. She had been the last person with Mark the previous evening, when they had dined together. She was deeply shocked, saying Mark had been perfectly all right the night before. Donald finally took her home. Sick though he had been all day with a continuous nausea, it was not until five in the afternoon that he could at last go to his apartment and lie down.

Few suicides have ever seemed to me so

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unforeseen, so unimaginable. It's unbearable to think of the pain, despair, and anger Mark must have felt.

From my journal: March 1971

A few days after Mark's death, the inventory was completed and it was found that three pictures in the inventory, oils on paper, were missing. There was a lot of art-world speculation about who had swiped the pictures.

Now, a year later, a man arrived at the Marlborough Gallery with three works on paper by Rothko. He said he was a dentist and that a patient of his had given him the pictures in lieu of payment. He would not say who the man was; he said the man had left the country and anyway he wasn't sure of the name. Bernard Reis and Donald quickly identified the pictures as those stolen from the studio. Since no one had been allowed in or out of the studio while it was being guarded, it is assumed that one of the policemen stole the pictures.

Four months after Rothko's death a major exhibition of Rothko's work was held in Venice at the time of the Biennale of 1970, and I was fortunate enough to be in the city for the opening in June. A red-and-gold banner announcing the exhibition hung from the balcony of Cá Pesaro. When I got to the *piano nobile,* the room was jammed despite the odd timing of a Sunday morning opening. Peggy Guggenheim arrived at about the same time as I did, in her gondola, her *gondolieri* in full livery, sporting the Guggenheim colors. Bernard and Becky Reis were with her—both seeming rather more grave than usual. It was such a short time since Mark's death and I had the certain feeling that they were sad, although deeply pleased by the splendor of the show. It could only be called a magnificent memorial.

I didn't quite expect the show to come off. The rooms of this palazzo are very large, with high ceilings, great windows, a luxuriance of baroque architectural detail. Donald McKinney, who had supervised the exhibition from the beginning, had hung the pictures with absolute tact, however. Nothing was crowded, no canvas pushed or canceled out another. It takes very fine pictures to compete with Venetian architecture and décor, especially in so beautiful a palazzo as Cá Pesaro. Miraculously, not only did the paintings hold their own, but they looked as if they had been destined all along to be shown in a palace. They did not seem out of place. The sunshine came pouring through the windows facing the canal, whose water reflected the ripples onto the ceilings and walls, an effect of purest magic.

Toute Venice was in attendance—the Volpis, Cicognas, the Barozzis, the Curtis family, to name only the most illustrious. The Venice Biennale directors, critics down from Milan and up from Rome, museum executives, collectors from both sides of the Atlantic, and the usual freeloaders—all were there, all looking very handsome and human as they moved in front of Mark's canvases. It reminded me of a saying of Mark's—that his works looked best with people about them. I suppose it had something to do with his sense of human scale.

I had lunch with Donald McKinney at Harry's Bar a few days after the Rothko opening. He looked handsome and fully recovered from the fatigue of the Rothko vernissage, at which he had seemed worn out. "Indeed, I was," Donald said. "Let no man imagine it is an easy task to install a show in a messy old palace in Venice." To his dismay Donald had found, after all the negotiating with the city fathers of Venice to obtain permission for the Rothko exhibition, that he had obtained only the walls and the space, and that was all. Cá Pesaro is a municipal museum, housing a very heterogeneous collection. Upon Donald's arrival, the director of the museum was nowhere to be found, nor did he make an appearance until later. He was "away." There were three old men, caretakers, who announced *pronto* that *"hanno fatto la guerra."* They were war veterans and, indeed, one of them was missing a leg. None of them quite knew where

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anything was (which reminded me of Mrs. Alfred H. Barr *trying* to see the sculptures of Medardo Rosso owned by Cá Pesaro). More than that, the walls, floors, and windows were very dirty. "I was particularly discouraged by the rags hanging on the windows," said Donald. "The Venetians are partial to those scalloped curtains called Austrian shades, but they had long outlived their capacity for use. I had to remove them." Since the old caretakers could barely walk, Donald found himself sweeping floors, then sending out for cleaning women in order to get the work done. Because the ceiling was very high (probably thirty feet) Donald was forced to use a ladder so rustic that the bark had been left on the wood; it was the only ladder high enough to reach the metal pipes from which the spotlights hung. Most of the lights were without bulbs or had bulbs which had long since burned out. Frightened though he was of rickety ladders and of climbing to such heights, Donald had no choice but to mount the rungs and replace the bulbs while *i vecchi* held on.

Meanwhile Rothko's canvases were waiting to be unpacked and hung. But when the wrappers were off, Donald discovered that there was not enough space in the *salle grande* to hang all of the paintings. A functionary had to be found and convinced that the two smaller rooms running parallel to the great hall were necessary for a complete hanging, especially since some of the smaller canvases would be lost in the wide spaces of the large room. When someone was finally located, he instantly put forward a series of objections best described as mindless. It finally dawned on Donald that this worthy gentleman expected something. *Una mancia* was quickly arranged, a suitable number of *lire* that made for a happier atmosphere. The final touches to the show were made shortly before the guests arrived. Donald had worked through the night.

"Well, it is a triumph," I commented. "Rothko's international reputation has been established beyond a doubt." "I suppose so," said Donald. "No other artist we've ever handled has cost us such a large investment. But who knows how long the market will last? Who knows how long any reputation will hold up?" We were both silent. I was thinking of Dufy, Bernard Buffet, the Neo-Romantics, Vlaminck, Utrillo, the Mexicans, Marie Laurencin . . . .

A few days later I asked Donald to have a drink with me at my hotel, since he had been so kind as to treat me to lunch. Anyway, it's pleasant to sit on the Cipriani terrace and watch the boats go by. "I understand," I said, "that you are leaving Venice tomorrow." We were settled at a table near the bar; it was about six o'clock and a few people had come down from their siestas. "Yes, I am, and God willing, I'm to have a two-week holiday in my house at Barrytown."

I asked Donald about the timing and the production of the Rothko exhibition. As recently as the first of June, virtually no one had heard anything about such an exhibition. It seemed to have come as a surprise, and not only to me.

Donald explained there was no possible way to announce the exhibition in advance since it was not a *fait accompli* until May 19. I then wanted to know how, if the decision had been reached so late, the catalogue, the poster, and all the publicity could have been made ready in so short a time—it seemed to me very unlike Marlborough to dawdle in making such a decision and then to rush everything. Donald told me the story.

Until May 19 Frank Lloyd, the head of Marlborough, refused to give permission for a memorial show unless an absolute agreement was reached between the gallery and the Rothko executors. Lloyd had insisted that his gallery be granted exclusive rights to sell *all* paintings in the estate from the same period of time, eight years, in which he had contracted to pay for the paintings purchased in 1969 and 1970—in all, a group of two hundred and five paintings. The profits from these paintings to be sold on consignment would, of course, go to the estate and the Rothko Foundation. Quite rightly, Lloyd realized that the value

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of the estate's pictures (many of them of poor quality) might easily drop if sold at random, thereby endangering the value of the canvases deemed first class. This seemed to me a reasonable and highly sensible stance since the expense of the Venice exhibition and other necessary shows would be high. The public does not realize that in order to sell pictures at "blue-chip" prices very large sums of money must be spent in developing a "blue-chip" market. Lloyd was too prudent a businessman to proceed in a venture which was not totally validated; an exclusive contract must be guaranteed.

"But my dear Donald," I said, "it is not possible to get a show ready in three weeks. Something would have to have been done long in advance, especially if you are dealing with people so elusive as the city fathers of Venice and the directors of its Biennale."

Donald nodded. The headaches involved in arranging the memorial show had begun shortly after Mark's death. The agreeable *la piccina* contessa, Carla Panicali, director of Marlborough's Rome branch, had almost immediately proposed the memorial. Being in Italy and knowing how to cut through the red tape, she took on the job of preparing the groundwork despite Frank Lloyd's refusal to give a definitive go-ahead. "After all," said Donald, "we could always cancel the show if negotiations with the executors failed."

Carla Panicali went to work. Remembering the mess of the 1958 Biennale, when Rothko's work had come off badly in the cramped space of the hideous American Pavilion, she decided to hold the exhibition in a prominent location in the middle of Venice. Several locations came under consideration. Lloyd rather favored Palazzo Grassi, a huge and impressive edifice owned by a Milanese businessman, Count Marinotti, and utilized for educational purposes. The city fathers hesitantly offered Cá Pesaro and wrote a somewhat ambiguous letter to Carla Panicali to that effect, but also made it clear that they would not finance the show. The situation became a game of cat and mouse, with Carla saying in elaborate and ambiguous language (Italian lends itself magnificently to such discourse) neither yes nor no. "It was a hanging-in process," said Donald. Thus, it was not until May 23 that Carla wrote to Guido Peocco, the director of Cá Pesaro, that the Marlborough Gallery would definitely rent space for the duration of the Biennale. She had also alerted her printers, an excellent firm in Rome called Tipografia Christen, with whom she had often done business, to be prepared for a rush job.

Twenty-seven paintings were finally sent, but not until the second week in June. The insurance for the four months of the show came to a bit less than $7,000.

"You see," said Donald, "it wasn't only the printers who did a rush job. The one nice thing, however, was Frank Lloyd's telegram, in which he said, 'Do the best you can and don't worry about spending money.' He was never one to be, as they say, penny foolish."

Being in Venice again and seeing the Rothko memorial exhibition inevitably revived memories of an earlier period in Venice, at the time of the Biennale of 1958, which included Rothko's work in the American Pavilion. Mark and Mel and their six- or seven-year-old daughter Kate arrived and took rooms in a house near where I was staying in San Travaso. The Rothkos were being entertained by Peggy Guggenheim and her entourage.

The house the Rothkos stayed in was one where Modigliani had once had a studio. The landlady was a nice old woman, a *marchesa* fallen in the world, who did her best to keep up appearances and to hold body and soul together. I went there in the late afternoon one Wednesday for drinks and was received in the garden. It was not a bad garden but neither was it a good one. There were a lot of fig trees, but the Italians are not keen about groomed gardens, and the weeds tend to burgeon. I was nicely received, however. Mark looked pleased to be in Venice; Mel looked distracted. In the middle of the scene was this child, Katie. I soon realized

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Mel had reason to look distracted. In general I like children, but this kid was different. No one could open his mouth without being turned off. She whined, she complained, she didn't like this, she didn't like that—and in a crescendo of nonstop activity she repeated, "When are we going to go home? When are we going to go home?" They had just arrived.

Since we are trained to think kindly of children, to be sensitive to their problems, I looked at Katie carefully and realized that she was rather large and overweight for her age and thought that this might not be very pleasant for her. But I also had the feeling that both Mark and Mel were intimidated by Katie. I couldn't help thinking that perhaps Mark had had a child too late in life, that perhaps Mel had no vocation for being a mother. At any rate, the whole scene was distinctly undelightful. But then the burdens of parenthood are beyond me.

One nice thing—little Katie was enchanted by finding a real fig on a fig tree that one could actually eat.

It was only after his death that I accidentally discovered some facts about Mark's early life. I was dining with a friend who told me Mark's name originally was Marcus Rothkowitz, that he had been born in Russia and transplanted to the Northwest coast when very young. My friend told me, "I was a pupil at the Center Academy of Brooklyn in the 1930s. My teacher was your Mark Rothko but my Marcus Rothkowitz." The school was attended by the children of rising Jewish merchants. Marcus Rothkowitz's wife, his first one, taught crafts. "Rothko was a terrible artist who made dreadful little woodcuts among other inept things," my friend told me, "but my mother bought one out of sympathy. It's still in her closet."

Rothko remarried a gentile from Ohio, a commercial artist who supported him for a few years doing freelance jobs. I sometimes wondered if it was gratitude combined with guilt that formed the nexus of his marriage to Mel, the source of what became a swelling and perennial incompatibility, a conflict which never ceased. By the late 1960s Mark was drinking as heavily as his so-called "alcoholic" wife. One assumes the two children, Kate and Topher, must by that time have set up defenses against the permanent war which raged between their parents.

Mark was prudent about money, however; he did all he could to help his wife and children, worried about the troubles of his friends, set up a foundation to aid older artists who might be sick or in bad financial straits. Beggars and bums aroused his compassion. He detested organized religion, superstition, big business, or anything else he might declare to be "establishment." Yet he pursued the rich, powerful, and even what he said he loathed—collectors, corporations, museums. His most ambitious series of paintings was for a chapel in Texas, commissioned by two wealthy Roman Catholics, Mr. and Mrs. John de Menil. The largest art corporation in the world, Marlborough, became his representative, his Mecca.

In 1971 Kate Rothko brought suit against the three executors of her father's estate, Theodoros Stamos, Bernard J. Reis, and Morton Levine, and the Marlborough Gallery. At the time Kate was a minor and her legal guardian was the sculptor Herbert Ferber, a former friend of the Rothko family. Although the legal proceedings were enormously complicated, in the main the suit contended that the executors had conspired to defraud the Rothko estate and the Foundation by making deals with the Marlborough Gallery which greatly undervalued Rothko works sold outright to the gallery, thereby benefiting the gallery at the expense of the estate. It was claimed that these deals were made out of self-interest on the part of the executors, since Bernard J. Reis, an accountant, had been in the employ of Marlborough, and Stamos was represented at the time of the suit by the Marlborough Gallery. The suit asked the Court to remove control of the estate from the executors.

In order to understand the trial and its ramifications it is necessary to understand the role of Bernard J. Reis, who was a central

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figure in the trial and in Rothko's life as well. He was not only Rothko's accountant but one of Rothko's closest personal friends. The whole Rothko case—and perhaps even Rothko himself—cannot be understood without some appreciation of their relationship.

The arrival of accountants in the art world was a development which unfolded rather slowly. In the Forties few American artists of the so-called avant-garde made their living from their work, and few needed accountants to take care of their affairs. However, accountants and lawyers for artists were increasingly a part of the scene after 1950. At that time, the accountants' bills were often paid for by the artists' exchanging works of art for the services rendered, as had long been the case with doctors' and dentists' bills. Several dentists around New York accumulated rather impressive collections in this manner and, of course, made extraordinary profits when their pictures were later sold. One dentist in particular became quite rich from the sale of his de Koonings. None of these people ever offered to share their gains with the artists. Why this behavior should be considered more acceptable than that of a dealer who buys pictures outright and then sells them for a profit is not easily explained.

Most dealers sent the artists who showed in their galleries statements every few months, usually quarterly. When pictures had been sold, a check for the sales was enclosed with the statement. As the American market grew, the artists found it too difficult to cope with problems involving taxes; there was a scramble to find accountants. Certain of them proved very helpful, but many of them would drop the artist after a few bad seasons. Hence many artists (and dealers) were always on the lookout for a good accountant.

Bernard Reis became the most celebrated accountant in the art world as far back as the 1940s. His character and career were remarkable, first because he was highly successful in his business and spent a major portion of his earnings on the purchase of art works, and second because his chief interest in life was the history of art and to that end not only did he put together an excellent library of art books, but he read them. He was astonishingly erudite. Traveling abroad with his wife Becky, Reis had early realized that to know art from books was useless; whatever one read about one must go and study *in situ*. The Reises traveled a good part of every year, rarely returning without objects or pictures that they had found in Tangiers or Paris or Rome or wherever else they had been. Whenever I told Bernard I was going someplace, he would immediately give me instructions as to what to see, as well as where to stay and which restaurants were best. "Be sure to look for the Zurbaráns in the Scola delle Belles Artes in Madrid. They're on, I believe, the third floor and perhaps the most dramatic of his white ecstatics. Also in Madrid, don't miss the Muse Romantico; it's a beautiful town house kept exactly as it was in the 1820s and reminds you of nothing so much as the romantic world of Joseph Cornell. And the great thing in Barcelona is the museum of Catalan art, particularly the frescoes brought down from ruins of monasteries which existed between the ninth and eleventh centuries."

The Reis collection was not simply a reflection of a certain taste, but solidly backed by careful study. Bernard bought slowly and shrewdly, rarely making snap decisions or capricious choices. Thus, his Matisses, his Soutines, his fine little Courbet landscape, the Degas, the Daumier, the Picassos were acquired as thoughtfully as were, at a later time, the works of the so-called New York School or the splendid masks and totems of primitive Esquimaux and Africans. There were probably about three hundred items in the Reis collection, but this does not include the remarkable *éditions de luxe* of many of the greatest artists and poets of the twentieth century; it was the kind of library that only a few collectors possess.

Bernard Reis began his business from scratch in 1918; in later years he had ten to fifteen other accountants working for him.

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When he retired in 1970 he was a rich man. It was not books and pictures which formed the core of Becky and Bernard's life, however; the living artist engaged their attention far more. When I first met the Reises I was still the managing editor of *View*. I attended a party at the town house of Peggy Guggenheim, who lived in the East Sixties and entertained often. I took quite a fancy to Becky Reis, for she was carrying a lorgnette through which she would peer with the amused eyes of a tiny owl. The lorgnette was part of her style and a distinct aid to her short-sightedness. A petite lady, she always wore huge primitive bracelets and necklaces of gold or ivory, which she carried with the same panache as her lorgnette. Bernard, pink-faced, often smiling, smoked constantly, his cigarettes in a plastic holder. It was he who associated with André Breton, Robert Motherwell, David Hare, and other Surrealists on the magazine *VVV*. Bernard served as the magazine's treasurer and accountant. From 1939 on, when the emigré artists began filtering into New York from war-ravaged Europe, the Reises took an active role in helping where they could. They were involved with the International Rescue Committee and fund-raising activities to help the refugee artists. A list of exiles they helped would be a list of many of the most distinguished artists of the twentieth century.

The Reis townhouse on East Sixty-eighth Street became one of the favorite gathering places for the European poets, painters, and intellectuals. Becky was celebrated for her food. She was an enthusiastic cook whose cookbook, produced many years later, was the subject of heated discussions. She thought nothing of serving dinners for twelve or sixteen people or of inviting eighty to a hundred people to her cocktail parties. In short, the Reises were more than casually involved in the New York art world. They were, in a sense, a part of its essence. It must be stressed again how small the art world of New York was at that time. At a single opening at Pierre Matisse's or Julian Levy's it would not be an exaggeration to say that most of it would be in attendance. Everyone seemed to know everyone else—a state of affairs which continued well into the 1950s when, precipitously, divisions between groups became increasingly marked. By 1960 there were several disparate art worlds. By 1970 the polarizations were complete and, in a sense, it became futile to use the phrase "art world." It had come to mean nothing.

Did the artists seek out the company of Bernard and Becky Reis because they were rich collectors and hosts? Did they seek out Bernard because they needed his professional services? Or did at least some of them rely heavily on the advice and friendship of two people who were both worldly and affectionate? In the case of Rothko, the reliance was largely of an emotional nature, even more than was his relationship with Stamos. If he hated museums, Mark hated lawyers even more, and in his mind what he needed most was an intimate friend who could also manage his financial, legal, and domestic affairs. Bernard thus became the central person in Rothko's life. They shared a certain conservative outlook toward life. There was no hint of sexuality in this friendship; Mark was morally an old-fashioned puritan, a Jew outside of Judaism, but with many of the characteristics of a conventional Jewish family man. Bernard, of course, lived an even more conventional life—promiscuity and bohemianism were beyond him, so much so that those who lived that way seemed to him mere curiosities, sometimes interesting, sometimes tiresome.

Rothko's dependence grew greater with the passing of time and his increasing success. It at last reached the point where he depended on Bernard for almost all decisions. Thus, it was the Reises who went house-hunting for Mark until a house was found on East Ninety-fifth Street that was both suitable and a good investment. Bernard arranged the mortgage. When Mark began to receive orders for paintings which could only be created in a well-appointed and commodious studio, Bernard made the arrangements for the large carriage house

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on East Sixty-ninth Street, which became the workshop for all the late, large-scale "series" canvases on which Rothko's fame may rest. It was Bernard more than anyone else who initiated the first profitable sales and brought Rothko together with the dealer who would be responsible for making him a multi-millionaire, Frank Lloyd. It was not until Rothko met Lloyd that his works could be said to have made any serious dent on the market.

I never really knew the third executor of the Rothko estate, Morton Levine. Mark apparently met him through Robert Motherwell and took it for granted that Levine must be a brilliant man because he was a "scientist" who taught anthropology and was married to a fine concert pianist. I have no idea if Levine was brilliant or not. (I have never taken anthropology seriously as a science.) In any case, a few years after his son Christopher was born, Rothko began worrying about what would happen to the boy if anything should happen to him. Mel was getting progressively worse, despite regular psychiatric treatment. Topher was fond of the Levines, and when he was old enough for music lessons he went to Mrs. Levine for instruction. The Levines were always delighted to have Topher with them and gave him a good deal of affection. Mark then asked Morton Levine to be the child's legal guardian, should he die. Later, when Rothko made out his will, he again asked Levine to serve with Bernard Reis and Stamos as an executor of his estate.

It was at one of Mark's Christmas Day parties that I first heard about the Rothko Foundation. Mark was fulminating about young artists—how spoiled they were, what terrible paintings they were doing, how wicked the museums were to give them so much attention while older artists, men of his generation, were being ignored and passed by. "I am setting up a foundation whose purpose will be to help men over fifty years old if they are sick or in trouble or just plain need money to keep going," Mark said. I asked who would decide who needed help. "Never mind about that. I'll have two or three good people who will know who the artists are that are talented and deserving. For instance, someone like your artist, Robert Goodnough." "But he's doing quite well," I replied a bit huffily. Mark laughed and said, "You never know what might happen."

When the Foundation did come into existence, Mark's wishes were carried out quite as he wanted them to be. Until the funds were cut off by the litigation, about $300,000 was dispersed in grants to artists and writers in need. Among the recipients were John Ferren, who was dying of cancer and desperately needed money for his hospital bills; and Parker Tyler, who had suffered a massive heart attack. The list is a long one. In all cases the money granted served as a buffer to artists in very real trouble.

When Kate Rothko brought suit against the executors of her father's estate, seeking to have them dismissed, Morton Levine promptly divorced himself from the other two executors, whom he did not know well. He set up a separate defense for himself with his own lawyers representing him in the surrogate court. This proved unfortunate both for himself and for the others, and ultimately destructive to all the defendants. By the time the case was actually being presented in court, he had lost his teaching job and his wife had divorced him. Topher was sent off to Ohio to be looked after by an aunt.

Any litigation surrounding the estate of an artist has the power to be ruinous to the market value and reputation of that artist's work. The lawsuit that surrounded the Bonnard estate, for instance, prevented any of his work from being sold for many years and caused the prices of Bonnards to drop precipitously. The long, ten-year lawsuit over the Raoul Dufy estate, which dragged through one court after another, was disastrous to Dufy prices. Out of sight, out of mind, as the saying goes. It took years to rebuild the Bonnard market. It is unlikely that Dufy's reputation will improve, except possibly for his early Fauve pictures. Since it is well known that a lawsuit involving the

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estate of an artist is imprudent, such litigation is fairly rare.

One of the things that surprised me, even before the trial proceedings began, was the fact that people always believed that only harmony reigned between the Marlborough Gallery and the Rothko executors. In fact, Stamos told me that he, Levine, and Reis came close to suing Marlborough at one point if more wasn't done by the gallery to push the paintings they had on consignment from the estate. The executors believed that Marlborough was emphasizing the work Lloyd had purchased outright from Rothko while he was still alive, and neglecting the estate pictures. At any rate, in 1970 the executors exacted a promise from the gallery to unload at least thirteen pictures before the end of the year for a guaranteed minimum total of $250,000. Stamos kept using the phrase "at good prices" to me, meaning as near as possible to the prices Marlborough obtained for the Rothkos they owned. From my professional standpoint, I, of course, wondered how the gallery could possibly fulfill its commitment. How can any gallery ever know who is going to buy what when?

It was Bernard who had been instrumental in linking Rothko with the Marlborough Gallery initially. He was certainly qualified to advise an artist on the choice of a gallery. He had come to know most of the collectors and dealers intimately; and he tended to be rather hardboiled professionally when representing his artist clients. Moving often between New York and Europe as he did, Reis was sharply aware of the values of the international art market and its business processes. No one knew better than he that the art market had for generations tended to be international in scope, and that the best art always transcended national and regional boundaries. Reis was aware that the American art market was changing into an international art mart.

One of the ways quality works of art can be judged is by their capacity to be understood in places far from where they were produced. There are, however, vast numbers of paintings which enjoy greater appreciation in their respective countries; for instance, the still lifes and landscapes of the seventeenth century in Holland. Even minor English art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is continuously popular in auction rooms and galleries in England. Most American art has been bought by Americans. Needless to say, there are exceptions to this tendency. There are eccentric collectors who will buy anything that hits their fancy. There was a Manchester businessman who enjoyed mid-nineteenth-century Italian genre pictures, a Texas oilman who bought nothing but English sporting scenes, a West German industrialist who was single-mindedly enthusiastic about American "Pop" art and bought it by the carload.

After World War II, a greatly enlarged number of buyers with fairly modest means began buying little known or unknown artists' works. But here again, the tendency was for the buyers to purchase from their respective countries or regions. The prosperous middle class of Milan supported a rash of new galleries featuring "new" and "advanced" works (the "new" and "advanced" being a reflection, by the way, of the art magazines, of what was going on in New York; the Milanese "avant-garde" let no grass grow under its nimble feet).

But if there were more people in the middle class with extra money to buy luxury commodities, it must be remembered that numerically there were also more extremely rich people (worth over five hundred million dollars) than there had been in previous epochs. This is true after most wars; it was certainly the case with the Americans, the West Germans, the Italians, the Spaniards, and certain international people, for instance, Gulbenkian in Portugal, the Gettys in England, the Greek shipping and oil people, all of whom bought great quantities of art and art objects.

The very rich, of course, have the opportunity to buy on the international market and are likely to acquire the finest works. For example, the purchase of Rembrandt's por-

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trait of Titus was made by the American collector Norton Simon for $2,234,000 and Gauguin's *Still Life with Apples* was sold to Stavros Niarchos for $297,145 in 1957 (a price which would be much higher now). The acquisition of a Cézanne landscape by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon for $800,000 in 1965 was, again, of a work that would now be worth far more.

During the 1960s there was an influx of dealers from Europe to New York. The new demand was for "Pop" art, and pictures by Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol sold for unbelievable prices in places like Düsseldorf and Cologne (I use the word "unbelievable" since I know what I could have acquired by Picasso, Miró, Braque, and other artists for the price of one Warhol *Campbell's Tomato Soup*).

It became increasingly clear that art collecting, art appreciation, even art making had become a substitute for religion. Art is now a religion, and its followers are true believers, lay contemplatives. To watch a disciple staring transfixed at a Jackson Pollock (after the sale of *Blue Poles* for $2,000,000) is like witnessing one of Zurbarán's saints receiving the stigmata. To observe new collectors displaying their prized Monets or Vuillards is to see beatitude on a mortal face. One longs to raise the cry "Hosanna!"

Can there be any correlation between art appreciation and the overall price index of twentieth-century paintings in general between 1951 and 1969? Picasso multiplied his prices over thirty times, Braque twenty-two times, Bonnard thirty-five times, Chagall over fifty times, Vlaminck thirty times. As the profits soared, more and more art galleries opened in New York, which had one advantage that France, Italy, and England did not: almost no restrictions on the trade of art works. Part of the reason Paris lost its dominance over the world market was the French government's restriction on exports.

Paintings and sculptures by Americans, however, were slow in reaching customers beyond our borders. Sam Kootz and Sidney Janis tried in the early 1950s to persuade Europeans of the importance of Abstract Expressionists. They did not succeed. When Picasso saw the paintings of Pollock he made a wry face and dismissed them as idiotic. Whatever paintings by Americans were sold at the time were at prices not unlike those at home. Nobody knew when or if the Americans would pass through *il portale d'oro*—the golden door. The resistance to "American type" painting is now forgotten, although even in the late 1960s the French minister of culture, André Malraux, told the directors of the Venice Biennale that if a French painter did not receive the top prize, the French would withdraw. The directors acquiesced.

Why none of the large-scale houses such as Durand-Ruel, Wildenstein, Knoedler, Paul Rosenberg, or Duveen had been able to make an international market for the Americans is hard to say. All of them, of course, handled Americans for domestic consumption. Knoedler, for instance, did a brisk trade in cowboy pictures by Remington; it was the favorite gallery of rich Westerners.

The first dealer of consequence to break the barrier and carry Americans into the world arena was a Viennese who had changed his name from Levai to Lloyd. Frank Lloyd started in London after World War II with nothing and emerged in a comparatively short time as the most powerful and efficient modern art dealer in the world at the head of the Marlborough Gallery. It was he, more than anyone else, who put the Americans firmly on the map and in the forefront of the contemporary art market.

This was at a time when the reputations of the Abstract Expressionists were beginning to fade in their own country as a consequence of the landslide of much younger artists appearing on the scene in the early 1960s (Pop, Kinetic, Minimalism, Color Field, etc.). It seemed momentarily in New York that the older artists were losing their position. The truth is that they had passed through the "golden door" and were, in effect, international commodities. It was largely Marlborough that took over the Abstract Expressionist school. Lloyd

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skimmed the cream, acquired sovereignty over the best work and, to a large degree, obtained contracts of exclusivity. The big money was now in New York.

In a curious way an art gallery is a mirror image of the person who creates it. There is a distinct difference between the informality of Betty Parsons, the intimacy of Jill Kornblee, the warm elegance of Pierre Matisse, the hodgepodge of Ivan Karp's O.K. Harris Gallery in SoHo. The moment Frank Lloyd opened the New York branch of Marlborough in the Fuller building in 1963, it was immediately clear that the gallery space reflected power, sophistication, international money. Nothing like it had ever before been seen in New York among private galleries. It was not, however, quite satisfactory to Frank Lloyd. There was too much trouble moving work, especially large sculptures, into and out of the building. The ceilings were too low and the floors, foolishly paved with gray slate, sucked up light and created a vaguely dismal ambience. Thus, when Sam Lefrak announced his new Squibb building to be built at 50 West 57th Street, Lloyd got hold of the building plans and entered into negotiations for the whole second floor. He got it.

It was Lloyd himself, looking like a happy cherub, who showed me around a few weeks before the new gallery space was opened in 1972. The architect Ed Barnes, whose Walker Art Center in Minneapolis I admired, had done what I thought was an excellent job of designing the space. More than half the space could be used for exhibitions, the rest was designated for viewing rooms, offices, storage, receiving, and packing. The design by Barnes cost $50,000 and the construction another $100,000. "Surely," I said, "it must have cost much more?" "Oh," replied Frank, "Sam Lefrak paid the rest." He grinned, which made me realize that Lefrak had spent at least as much, if not more.

Although I had seen most of the great art establishments both in New York and Europe, I realized there was nothing to which I might compare this vast enterprise, certainly not Maeght in Paris or Wildenstein or Knoedler in New York. The storage room bulged with pictures and statues that I knew represented only a small part of the Marlborough "stock"; there was much more in warehouses. And this newest Marlborough was only one branch of the international organization. There were two more in London, others in Zurich, Tokyo, Toronto, Montreal, and Rome. Lloyd's family trust was located in Nassau; its financial operation in Liechtenstein.

I was curious about how much it would cost to operate the New York gallery per annum. My guess was certainly more than a million dollars, counting the expenses for the large staff, insurance, rent, publicity, storage, and the rest of the expenses any gallery encounters. I did eventually find out that in order to "break even" at least two and a half million dollars' worth of work needed to be sold a year.

My own little gallery on Fifty-seventh Street cost $4,500 for each monthly exhibition, which meant, with a 50 percent commission on consigned work, I had to sell nine thousand dollars' worth of work each month simply to keep the doors open. Two or three exhibitions in a row that did not sell (and this sometimes happened, since I showed so much work by totally unknown artists) would cause the gallery great concern. Then, of course, I had to reckon with the reality that the art season was of nine months' duration—July, August, and September were hopelessly dull, a time for closing. The rent, however, had to be paid twelve months a year.

What happens at the new Marlborough, I could not help but think, if Robert Motherwell, Beverly Pepper, Philip Guston, or Franz Kline don't sell? Even with the rest of the "stock," the risk seemed to me large, daunting.

But then, of course, there *was* the rest of the "stock," as Lloyd himself was only too pleased to show me, in his private office. That day the stock included two Picassos, a wondrous Pissaro, a Chagall, two Feining-

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ers, and a superb Munch. All of them had been bought recently, and all of them would be gone very soon. Lloyd had just sold an expensive Van Gogh. If Charles Merrill was a genius in the investment business, certainly Lloyd was a genius of art merchandising. When I later heard that Pope Paul was buying pictures for the Vatican collection from Lloyd, I could not register surprise.

Lloyd, as might be expected, was a controversial figure, and there were many who loathed him. He was a screamer and a yeller, and many Marlborough employees came and went in quick succession, unable to stand the pressure. The intense competitive workings of a vast organization such as Marlborough was the antithesis of the genteel, relaxed pleasantness of old-time galleries; I often had the feeling that I, too, would last less than a week if I worked at Marlborough. And, of course, it was Lloyd himself who set the style and pace for his own gallery. I once heard his persuasive charm described by a former employee as "whipped cream on top of a spiked helmet."

Donald McKinney, who was appointed president of the New York Marlborough, not only survived but thrived. Collectors were very fond of him and he had a phenomenal sales record. He was also blessed with nerves of steel and, for whatever reason, Lloyd seemed never to upset him. Actually, Lloyd seemed to scream and yell far less around his new president.

Even if Lloyd was generally considered a shrewd operator, there were those who sometimes felt they had gotten the best of him. I remember in February of 1969 my friend Herbert Machiz, while out walking the dog, encountered Rothko on Madison Avenue. "You look like a cat who has devoured a mouse," Herbert told him. Rothko wore an expression of satisfaction which, combined with much twinkle in his eyes, gave him the look of a naughty leprechaun, Herbert later told me. "Indeed, I have devoured a mouse," Rothko replied. "Which mouse?" asked Herbert. "Well, not a mouse actually. A large tiger. I've just finished negotiating my newest contract with my dealer. Nothing gives an artist more pleasure than getting the better of a dealer or collector." Rothko's dealer at the time was, of course, Marlborough and Frank Lloyd. "And how did you do that?" "Easy," said Rothko. "They were buying a big batch of pictures from me and I upped the price on all of them." Herbert suggested Mark come back to the house to celebrate with a drink. There was no more art talk when they arrived. I was home, and the three of us were soon off on Mark's pet subject, Irene Worth and the world of the theater.

My own professional dealings with Frank Lloyd were both unusual and amusing. In the early fall of 1962, I accepted an invitation to visit Lee Krasner Pollock for a weekend in East Hampton. When I arrived, she informed me that Frank Lloyd would be coming for dinner that Saturday evening. "Good heavens," I said, "won't that be an embarrassment? After all, I'm suing him." Lee became irritated. "Don't be silly," she exclaimed. "You're a grown man, and besides, you ought to know what he thinks about *l'affaire Rivers*." Indeed, I did want to know. I had brought an action for breach of contract with Larry Rivers, an artist I had launched in the early 1950s, and our suit was not going well. My brother-in-law, a lawyer, had advised me to drop the whole thing before I met with disaster. Another lawyer had advised that suing an artist was hopeless because an artist could always claim that his "muse did not burgeon." The legal fees would be enormous and the only person to gain would be the artist, through the publicity inevitably generated in any such case.

As it turned out, the dinner was fun. Lee, being in one of her good moods, told hilarious stories, thus baiting me into being more outrageous than usual. Mr. Lloyd never stopped laughing. At one quiet moment, however, I was able to talk to him. "You know," he said, "when Rivers came to see me in London, I was not aware of his gallery situation in New York. He signed an exclusive with me. I suggest you take for your gallery whatever pictures you feel

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would be a proper settlement for the expenses you've already accrued. As for the suit, it will cost us both an arm and a leg. Dealers never win and the artist's market is sometimes ruined."

I accepted the offer. Three days later Mr. Lloyd sent me a bottle of Courvoisier to seal the bargain.

In February of 1974, I stopped off at the Marlborough Gallery to pick up some material for an article I was writing. By chance, while I was there, I ran into two collectors who had been former clients of mine. They asked me if I would look at a small Bonnard they were considering for purchase. Neither husband nor wife could make up their minds. I went into the viewing room and there was Frank Lloyd, who greeted me affectionately as always. He then left me with his clients. The Bonnard was a delightful small landscape, which I analyzed for my friends as well as I knew how. I commented that it was a wonderful picture. Then I left.

About three days later I received a charming note from Mr. Lloyd, thanking me for helping conclude the sale. He also enclosed a check as my commission. I was very touched. My gallery certainly needed the money, but it had never occurred to me that I should receive a reward for advising. It was an elegant gesture that gave me a sense of Lloyd's style as a businessman.

I have never understood precisely how the Rothko case began, how a young girl who was left a handsome inheritance made the decision to sue her father's three closest friends and the art gallery which had been responsible for making a large fortune for herself and her family. No other lawsuit in the history of art was ever so expensive, and it seemed fairly clear from the beginning that, win or lose, neither the petitioners nor the defendants could gain much. Only the lawyers for both sides would be certain to profit.

Certainly, in her statements to the press, Kate Rothko never clarified the matter. In an interview with *The Washington Post* in the winter of 1976, she told a reporter that the main thing she wanted out of the lawsuit was to have her father's pictures. All that she appeared to possess were a few posters. "I still don't have a single painting by my father, not a single one," she was quoted as saying. Yet at the time of her mother's death, there were approximately forty Rothko paintings in the house, which had been left to the family in Rothko's will. One wonders what happened to these works.

In the same interview, Kate Rothko tells of her parents going to the Four Seasons restaurant and how angry her father was. "My parents ate there once, the night the paintings were unveiled. I can still remember them coming home that evening. My father was enraged."

In fact, the Rothko paintings, although purchased for the Seagram Building, were never delivered. As soon as Mark heard they were intended for a restaurant, he had decided the location was inappropriate and he had returned the check. Several of these works ended up in the Tate Gallery in London.

One of the major disputes during the trial was the number of works in the Rothko estate and, a more sticky problem, what was their value. I remember I had asked Stamos about two months after Rothko's death how many pictures were left in the estate. At that point the executors were just beginning to take up the tasks designated for them in the will, and I was curious about how they would solve some of the many problems they would have to deal with.

Stamos told me that there were perhaps seven hundred items in the inventory, dating back to very early efforts and including work in a variety of media. The problem with much of it was its quality, ranging from downright bad or mediocre to excellent. Many of the pictures were in poor condition, and much restoration, including stretching and framing, would be required. I immediately wondered where the works would be stored and who would undertake the large job of acting as curator. The greatest number of works I had ever kept in my

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own gallery was about three hundred and fifty. Keeping track of them, as well as the other works scattered among museums, private collections, lending "libraries," and in artists' studios, was never an easy task. Overseeing seven hundred or more works struck me as a formidable and daunting effort.

Stamos told me that the pictures would remain in the warehouse where they had been placed after Rothko's death. He did not know what specific course would be undertaken, which would be decided after further negotiations. This might take several months, he told me.

I ventured the opinion that the estate would incur a raft of expenses. Stamos agreed, and added that the executors would follow the best program open to them. He was anxious that the activities of the Rothko Foundation get started, as new applications were being submitted. The executors were, as before, discussing requests for grants. The immense task of compiling a *catalogue raisonné* of Rothko's work would have to wait until there were sufficient funds in the estate.

"It is a shame," I commented, "that Mark himself did not initiate a catalogue. Lee Pollock began the indentification and dating of Jackson's work a few years after he died. That task has been going on with well-trained art historians since 1960, but it is still far from complete." (The Pollock *catalogue raisonné* was eventually published in 1978.)

Like everyone else in the art world, I of course followed the Rothko trial closely. Like everyone else in the art world, I got most of my information about how the case was proceeding from *The New York Times.* However, it seemed to me that the *Times* was slanting its coverage to the side of the petitioners and heavily against Marlborough and the executors of the estate. Because many people regard the *Times* as a sort of bible, general opinion ran against the defendants. It was easy for people to feel sorry for the helpless young daughter suing to save her father's estate. Even people in the art world who had not had the personal contact with Rothko, the executors, and the gallery which I had had, were ready to judge harshly. The case became the prime subject of conversation at art-world dinner parties, and most of the facts bandied about at these dinners came from the *Times.*

However, there were several elements about the case which the *Times* reporters did not make clear. It wasn't explained that the initial conservative estimates of the pictures were typical of estate valuations. Also, many of the pictures left in the estate were of far-from-first quality. The general public does not understand how carefully an artist's market must be cultivated, and how carefully a gallery must shore good pictures against bad ones. It was never made clear in what poor condition many of the older works were, either rolled up, torn, dirty, or all three. In my opinion the executors had acted quite prudently in having the estate pictures evaluated as modestly as possible. The *Times* also paid scant attention to the work of the Rothko Foundation, which the executors had undertaken so diligently and with a deep concern to fulfill Mark Rothko's express wishes to help older artists in need.

Of course the varying opinions of Rothko and his work expressed during the trial led to much exaggerated chatter. Personally, I did not agree with Meyer Schapiro and some of the other "experts" called in to express their opinion as to the magnitude of Rothko's genius. I had always thought of him as a splendid and alluring minor figure (major, perhaps, for American art) by comparison with such great twentieth-century masters as Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Miró, Braque, etc. What Rothko achieved was limited by comparison with the "giants." As far as I am concerned, the only major painter America has produced is Jackson Pollock.

I, of course, knew about Rothko's, and later the executors', deals with Frank Lloyd and Marlborough, which seemed to confuse so many people and cast the gallery in a bad light with the public. When I first heard of Lloyd's having promised to sell so many of

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Rothko's pictures within eight years, I thought he was taking a fantastic gamble. I did not see how so many could be sold within a short time. I knew, because of my professional background, exactly how much work, and expense, would be involved to move the paintings Marlborough had bought from Mark and taken on consignment from the estate. I understood the need to make a decent profit on each sale in order to insure the continued functioning of the overall gallery operation. I also understood the need for the executors to sign an exclusive with Frank Lloyd on such a contract to protect the considerable time and financial investment he had made in Rothko's work, the Venice show being only one example. Lloyd would have been in a very bad position if inferior Rothkos were being circulated by other galleries in competition with the best work, of which Marlborough had a large portion. Thus, the executors had no choice but to offer exclusivity to Marlborough for pictures in its consignment, and not to other galleries.

Although these dealings seemed to me, as a gallery director, perfectly straightforward, they confused even many people in the art world and added to the impression that Marlborough and the executors had acted in collusion. There were, however, other actions on the part of the gallery which confused even me. These had to do with the two restraining orders, a temporary one of June 26, 1972, and a permanent one of September 26, 1972, issued by the court to prevent the gallery and the executors from selling any more of the Rothko pictures which the gallery had on consignment from the estate. Apparently, however, fifty-seven such pictures were invoiced *before* the first restraining order and shipped out later.

Press coverage of the trial suggested that the dates of the invoices and indeed many of the sales themselves seemed phony and that anything that was delivered was in violation of the court's restraining order. The implication was that the gallery had acted to avoid the injunction and that by creating fictitious purchases, the gallery made profits which it did not share with the estate properly and fairly. I knew most of the names to whom the pictures were reported to have been sold. They were the usual mixture of rich and well-publicized collectors. But there were other names which meant nothing to me. Of course, the intelligent very, very rich move smoothly and silently doing whatever they wish to do. I remember reading a list of fifty-three Americans who were worth more than five hundred million dollars and being astonished at how few names I recognized. Baudelaire taught us that one of the first tricks of the Devil is to convince us that he does not exist. The truly rich like to convince Americans that they don't really exist and prefer not to cut figures in society. Alas, their children often do. They are known as "big mouths."

Kate Rothko finally had her way, of course. On December 18, 1975, slightly less than five years after her father's death, Judge Midonick removed the three executors of the Rothko estate and assessed damages and fines totaling $9,252,000 against the executors, Frank Lloyd, and the Marlborough Gallery.

As *The New York Times* reported the next day, the judge found that the executors had acted in a conflict of interest or negligently in the selling and consigning of 798 of the artist's paintings to Lloyd for much less than their true value and under terms that were highly disadvantageous to the estate. The Surrogate Court canceled the contracts for the transfer of the 798 paintings and directed their return to the estate. In his 58-page decision Judge Midonick granted most of the requests of Kate Rothko and the state's Attorney General, Louis J. Lefkowitz, who had joined the suit because Rothko had left half of his estate to a charitable foundation.

The record damages included a $3.3 million fine against Lloyd and his galleries which the judge said could be mitigated by the return to the estate of the Rothko paintings which Lloyd had sold in violation of the court order. Lloyd was also held in contempt of court for those sales. The judge

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found that Reis and Stamos had acted in conflict of interest and they were held liable with Lloyd and Marlborough for the total damages and fines "individually and severally." Morton Levine was ruled to have been "negligent" and he was held liable for six million dollars of the damages. These damages were to be paid to the estate and the judge also denied the three executors the commissions they were entitled to under the law of at least two percent of the gross value of the estate for each.

Because the executors had sold 100 paintings for an average price of $18,000 and had given the other 698 works on consignment for a fifty percent commission, paintings which one "expert" said were worth as much as $32 million, Judge Midonick wrote in his decision that the evidence showed a "curious atmosphere involving absence of hard bargaining, arms-length negotiations, deliberate consideration, and the presence of improvidence and waste verging upon gross negligence on the part of all the executors as well as a breach of duty of disinterested loyalty on the part of the executor Reis and the executor Stamos."

"The acts and failure to act of the three executors were clearly improper," the judge continued, and the contract they had made with Marlborough showed "unconscionably low provision as to price" and "unreasonably long payout terms" and "indefiniteness of minimum price provision." The judge ruled that Levine's lack of personal gain did not free him from responsibility as he had assisted in causing loss to the estate. As far as Lloyd was concerned, the judge declared, "It is clear that this litigation was the occasion for a hasty sale of consigned paintings at inadequate prices," and that Marlborough Gallery had, "at the direction of Lloyd, willfully disposed of estate paintings in bulk resulting in falsely low prices at the time of such sales." The judge pointed out that the one hundred paintings sold directly to Marlborough by the estate had been resold "at retail from 6 to 10 times what [Marlborough] undertook to pay to the estate for them." The Gallery and its affiliates were, said the judge, "certainly aware of the conflict of interest and as such are chargeable with notice that the executors were committing a breach of their duty."

At the time of the ruling, Kate Rothko was twenty-four and a student at Johns Hopkins Medical School. Christopher was twelve, away at a private school in the East, but visiting his sister and her husband on weekends. Bernard Reis was eight-one, Stamos was sixty-two.

The executor Morton Levine, professor of anthropology at Brooklyn College, was given to attacks of acute depression—before and during the trial. He found it necessary to undergo psychotherapy. His emotional condition was exacerbated by a separation from his wife, the musician who had taught music to Christopher Rothko. Topher had lived with the Levines after Mel Rothko's death, before being sent to his relatives in Ohio. The Levines were divorced in 1974. Shortly thereafter Professor Levine was denied tenure by Brooklyn College; eventually he found work at Fordham University. He died of cancer in January 1982.

Stamos was so distraught by the Rothko trial that he suffered a few severe emotional breakdowns. The market for his paintings was put in lasting jeopardy. Stamos's only real possession was his house, which he lost as part of the judgment. Stamos thus lived in a state of constant worry and concern over his impending eviction. He began living for six months of the year on a remote Greek island when not teaching at the Art Students League in New York. His close friend Alan Thieckler, who had served as one of a group of restorers of Rothko's canvases, died of cancer of the lymph nodes in August, 1973, in the midst of the trial.

Bernard Reis was so disturbed by the accusations made against him that he suffered a stroke which made it impossible for him to appear in court as a witness for himself and the other executors. After two additional strokes, he died in 1978. In despair, he had declared himself bankrupt. Mrs. Reis was put in the position of losing her home

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to the claimants (mainly the lawyers), but she was fortunately able to buy it back with her daughter's help. Many of the pictures in the Reis collection had to be sold.

The Rothko Foundation, originally designed to help indigent older artists, became, as a result of the trial, a center for the dissemination of Rothko's pictures to museums throughout the world.[1] As yet, no *catalogue raisonné* of the Rothko oeuvre has been published by the Foundation.

As for Frank Lloyd, he returned a large number of Rothko pictures which mysteriously reappeared from Europe. He thus covered much of the fine leveled against Marlborough. However, as a non-citizen and with possible further criminal proceedings in the offing, Mr. Lloyd discreetly left the United States for his residence in the Bahamas. For several years he was *persona non grata* in New York. In early 1982, Lloyd returned to America. He posted a one-million-dollar bond and announced that he would answer the Attorney General's accusations of criminal malfeasance.

There was talk, of course, that Lloyd might finally go to jail. Everyone expected the judgment to go against him—and, sure enough, it did. As *The New York Times* reported on December 5, 1982, "Frank Lloyd, the owner of the Marlborough Gallery and one of the world's best known art dealers, was convicted yesterday on charges of tampering with evidence in connection with a lawsuit against him, his gallery and the executors of the estate of Mark Rothko, the painter." The *Times* concluded its story by reporting that "Mr. Lloyd, who could be sentenced to four years in prison on each of the three counts in the indictment, remained free on a $1 million personal-recognizance bond."

But if for so many others directly involved in the Rothko case, it had ended in tragedy or death, for Frank Lloyd it ended on a note of unexpected comedy. When Acting State Supreme Court Justice Herbert I. Altman handed down his sentence on January 6, it proved to be one of the most hilarious and bizarre decisions in the history of art-world litigation. It wasn't to jail that Frank Lloyd was sent, but on a mission to enlighten school children about the values of art. As the *Times* reported in its front-page story the next day: "One of the world's best known art dealers was sentenced on a criminal conviction to set up a scholarship fund and art-appreciation programs for New York City high school students." This must be the first time in history that spending money on art appreciation programs was officially acknowledged to be a form of punishment! One can imagine what Mark, with his disdain for such programs, would have made of this "happy" ending to the Rothko case.

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1 By special arrangement with the Rothko Foundation, the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis will show, in a special installation, from February 6 through March 27, 1983, "Mark Rothko: Seven Paintings from the 1960s." The four canvases and three works on paper that make up the exhibition will subsequently remain at the Center on an extended, two-year loan.

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The writer's role: responses to Hortense Calisher

Editor's note: "The long, shining table: writers in Eastern Europe" by Hortense Calisher appeared in the January issue of The New Criterion. *What follows are four observations on some of the issues raised in Miss Calisher's essay, and her own response thereto.*

The small, battered desk

by Stanislaw Barańczak

As someone who comes from Poland and knows a little about Polish literary life, I can only regret that Miss Calisher didn't brush against my country while traveling through Eastern Europe. She would have seen a couple of things which don't quite fit into the questionable scheme of alternatives which form the standpoint of her otherwise excellently narrated story. First of all, in Warsaw she wouldn't have been entertained by any writers union. The Polish Writers Union has been suspended by the military regime, as a retaliation for being too independent and having a democratically elected administration. (So perhaps in Eastern Europe one can be "unionized" not by the government but against it?) Second, even if she was at the Union's headquarters, the scenery might well have looked quite different from what she found in Bucharest or East Berlin. There would have probably been another "long, shining table," but underneath it the hand of a Polish writer would most certainly have passed to Miss Calisher a copy of some recent *samizdat*. (So perhaps in Eastern Europe censorship is not always "cozily suffered"?) Third, in Poland she couldn't have avoided meetings with numerous well-known and admired writers just returning from prisons and internment camps. (So perhaps it's not quite precise that in Eastern Europe "out of favor, one is faceless altogether"?)

These are only some of the possible complications Miss Calisher would have encountered during her visit to Poland. But it seems to me that even in the countries she visited, she didn't—to put it in a Bostonian way—meet the right people. Talking to official writers or writer-officials across a long, shining table is not the best way to spend your time in Eastern Europe, if you want to learn anything about its literatures. There are other writers and other forms of literary life, even in Romania.

To return to Poland, which I know best: if we apply Miss Calisher's report to the Polish literary scene, the author's generalizations appear ill-fitting and misleading. The essay's basic idea boils down to this commonplace: an American writer is free but speaks to no one; an East European writer enjoys a wide audience but is not free—he either speaks on behalf of his government or, if he is "controversial," risks conflict with censors or even imprisonment.

I said it's a commonplace. It's something worse: it's an oversimplification.

Why? Let me exploit a device once used

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by Czeslaw Milosz in his *Captive Mind* and present four brief depictions of Polish writers: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta. All four are authentic contemporary figures (different, of course, from those in Milosz's book); their real names are irrelevant, though, since they are more typical than individual.

Alpha is what we can call an official writer. As a well-known public figure, he openly supports the regime; in exchange, he is handsomely rewarded with honors, positions, money, and new editions of his books. His works have been printed in hundreds of thousands of copies. But is he widely read? Not at all. His books can be found in every bookstore, covered with dust; once in a while they go to a shredding mill and a state-owned publishing house prints a new edition. The socialist economy knows no market laws and the number of printed copies of a book has nothing to do with the writer's popularity. Recently Alpha learned this fact in a painful way: after one of the television appearances in which he praised the military rule, angry readers began to return his books, heaping them up in front of his apartment.

Beta also enjoys official acceptance, but he is less suitable as a public figure. He writes police thrillers, a genre which in countries like Poland consists in a peculiar mixture of the cheapest Western mass culture and the cheapest Eastern propaganda. The public would rather read Agatha Christie or Raymond Chandler, but these are not always available. So Beta is widely read. But is he respected? No. Just the opposite; he is everybody's laughingstock: people read his clumsy apotheoses of militiamen only because they want some entertainment and there is nothing else at hand.

Gamma is a writer who is, to all intents and purposes, independent while also secure. He is a cultured and talented man; he never had anything to do with propaganda or other official services. The regime, on the other hand, has learned to tolerate Gamma and even use his name sometimes as an example of the country's cultural achievements. So Gamma is generally respected. But is he able to write what he really thinks? Hardly. He had to pay a price for his relative independence: he had to become harmless. In fact, long ago he silently gave up "controversial" subjects and since then hasn't written anything except historical novels (or avant-garde plays, or hermetic poetry, or translations from Vergil).

Finally we have Delta, who could be called the exact opposite of an official writer. What distinguishes him from Gamma is that he is independent but by no means secure. He speaks his mind quite openly and has already faced many forms of harassment: he was dismissed from his job, blacklisted by censorship, prohibited from traveling abroad, interned under martial law. He still writes what he thinks. But is he—as we might expect—compelled to choose between endless coping with censorship and writing for his desk drawer? Not really. As a matter of fact, he is widely read: though the state-owned publishing houses don't print his books, his work is published either in the émigré press (and later smuggled in or broadcast to the country) or underground. The latter has proved particularly effective: uncensored publishing, having flourished since the mid-Seventies, exists even now, under the rule of the generals, although it has become quite a dangerous occupation.

What I'm trying to say is that in Eastern Europe there are many more particular patterns of the relationship "writer-society-government" than Miss Calisher seems to have noticed. Of course, very much depends on local and historical circumstances. During a reign of sheer terror the rulers offer a simple choice indeed: either you serve us or we annihilate you. But sometimes, as in today's Poland, even relatively harsh persecution cannot simplify the complex picture: people under pressure react in many ways, and writers are no exception. Generally, though, one thing can be said: in Poland the syndrome of an "official, yet popular writer" is virtually non-existent today. If someone is a mouthpiece of hated authority, people don't care to read him.

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I am not in a position to speak expertly of American literature, but I also doubt whether in America the opposite syndrome of an "independent, but solitary writer" is so fatally unavoidable. The only thing in Miss Calisher's analysis that I unconditionally agree with is her conviction that it's much better to be free for the price of isolation than to be popular for the price of enslavement. However, the most interesting thing about East European literatures today is precisely that they sometimes illuminate a third way. In a captive nation not every writer is an example of a captive mind. In other words, in today's Poland, and to this or another extent in every country of Eastern Europe, the literature that really counts is written by spiritually free people who enjoy an astonishingly wide reception precisely because they dare to be free.

Such writers have much more in common with their American colleagues than with their own officials. But if we want to get to know such a writer, we can't talk to him across that long, shining table. We rather have to look into what he writes at his small, battered desk.

Alone with the page

by William Barrett

Hortense Calisher is a sensitive observer, and she has given us a vivid impression of the literary politicking in the satellite countries. Here are the joustings for favor, the worried looks over the shoulder to see who may or may not be traveling precisely with the Party line, the knowledge that Big Brother in Moscow will have the final say. There would seem to be nothing enviable in the lot of these Balkan literati.

But suddenly, almost invisibly, there is a switch in Miss Calisher's mood. Perhaps the situation of these people is in a way to be envied by American writers, who are without the protection of unions and have to go on alone and alienated within the body of society. The American writer has freedom, but it is somehow a lonely and desperate freedom.

I confess to feeling a little confused at Miss Calisher's line of reasoning here. Is she suggesting that the American writer surrender his freedom for some more corporate and socialized form of existence? I doubt she would be willing to follow through with a suggestion like that, in view of the consequences of unionization in the Communist world.

On the isolation of the writer there is one very fundamental distinction to be made. There is a loneliness of the writer that is essential to his calling. When he faces the blank page he is alone with himself and his life, in as radical a way as only the confrontation with death can bring. If the writer would shun such confrontation, then there is nothing for him to do but give up the profession. He cannot escape from the freedom of self-confrontation into some socialized existence and still pretend to be a serious writer.

On the other hand, there is the kind of isolation and alienation that writers and critics have been complaining about these many, many years. This is the alienation of feeling powerless in a culture where literature is not given as high and central a place as it should be. Are American writers so distant from the seats of power? I'm not as sure as I once was. In any case, the remedy would hardly be to turn things over to a system that has resulted in the death of literature wherever it has been applied.

Against prophets with honor

by Cynthia Ozick

I happened on Hortense Calisher's record of a journey just after returning myself from some literary encounters abroad: at the long, shining table of the Rockefeller Foundation's conference center in Bellagio, Italy. At that table, after three days of impassioned

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free annunciation and sardonic free denunciation by writers from several countries—everyone there, including a number of escapees from Eastern Europe, was now living in freedom and had either as a birthright or as a friendly new acquisition the talent for yelling whatever came freely to mind—I heard the Canadian critic Ruth Wisse put literature in its place. Literature, she said, cannot be a stand-in for an integrated culture; it cannot make do for what is not there; it cannot fill in the missing parts; it cannot represent powers not its own, no matter how urgently these powers are needed.

In other words, where writers are taken too seriously, watch out for something rotten, incomplete, unhealthy.

American writers are not taken seriously. We know that. They don't matter; they don't count. They are unnoticed by all levels of government: federal, state, municipal, the passing cop car. They are unnoticed by most levels of the populace. The connections between books and life, when present at all, are weak.

"It still rests me," Hortense Calisher writes, "to be in any country where the connections between books and life are real . . . . I am learning that it's inspiriting to be where writers can be dangerous."

She is of course not speaking of America. She is speaking of the totalitarian countries. "These writers," she says of the Eastern European intellectuals who live (at best) under censorship, "however compromised, or whether or not they want to be political, are 'official' in another sense, long lost to us . . . . [T]heir nation, like much of Europe, has long awarded them a respected role in its history, not only as watchdogs of the ethics of nations, but also as enunciators of the powers of life—and . . . this still goes far deeper in the national fabric than it does with us . . . . So it is, paradoxically, that in Russia and all its orbit writers have impact comparable to the scientists—and have equal perils—since in both the people's mind and the regime's their influence is real." And: "What these men write is considered to be important. So necessary to the nation that if they say the 'wrong' thing, they can go to prison for it."

Now it is clear that Calisher is not, even obliquely, praising tyranny for strengthening character. She has nothing to say in praise of tyranny and everything to say in praise of nobility: "It's ennobling, to be honored not for your own name or books, but in the name of all writers . . . ." Still, there is something gritty, unresolved, worrisome, in this celebration of writers "with a respected role." It arouses in me an unease: the idea of nobility *in extremis,* the writer's hope, in Blake's phrase, to "build a Heaven in Hell's despair"—as if that were the only place heaven *can* be built.

Bravery in the face of tyranny—hazardous, unimaginable for those fortunate enough to have only to imagine it, and surely crushingly, horrendously frightening—cannot be the only kind of writer's heroism. Bravery requires opposition and obstacle. It does not always—even when we speak of purely political bravery—require tyranny as its foil. After all, cowardice in a context where you know nothing terrible will happen to you for an act of courage (or at least nothing more terrible than public derision) is twice cowardly. And in a free society, "dissent" can be the way of cowardice.

I offer one example—somewhat stale, but not without current significance. The author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* a magnificent intelligence, nevertheless leaves her deepest imprint in the phrase "the banality of evil." Partly this is the result of noisy journalism turning, after a time, into legend; partly it is the lasting impact of a bad mistake. The bad mistake, it seems to me, was in Hannah Arendt's wish—in conditions of free expression—to be in a posture of dissent, which manifested itself in the desire, always and without exception, to be "original." Now to be "original" in the Soviet orbit—that is, to be an outspoken or even self-suppressing dissenter—is without question, as Calisher tells us, a dangerous and ennobling act. But to live free of censorship, to live free of the threat of the punitive, and

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to be original essentially to distinguish yourself from postures that are passionately held by the majority, and to seek separation from those majority views in a way that contravenes the most obvious truth only because you disdain the obvious and dislike to find yourself amid the majority—that, I think, smacks of showiness, self-indulgence, willful dishonesty. And cowardice. If all the philistines in a free country stop for red lights, running them does you no honor—certainly not intellectual honor.

In the case of Adolf Eichmann, Arendt ran the red light. It was of course obvious—and the important word *is* "obvious"—to the simplest moral intelligence that Eichmann, in his indefatigable implementation of the Final Solution, was beyond the ordinary. During Eichmann's trial, evidence of the extraordinary became mountainous. Arendt herself had notably contributed to an understanding of how Naziism in general was extraordinary. "In Nazi Germany," she wrote in *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* "questioning the validity of racism and anti-Semitism when nothing mattered but race origin, when a career depended upon 'Aryan' physiognomy (Himmler used to select the applicants for the SS from photographs) and the amount of food upon the number of one's Jewish grandparents, was like questioning the existence of the world." If *this* is not a description of the extraordinary (even Swift's fecundity could not have invented it), then what is? The majority of thinking humanity, including, certainly, nearly every Jew, had come to agree with Arendt on this very point: and that was the source of the trouble. The majority of thinking humanity felt violated by the daily newspaper exposure to the extraordinariness of the Nazi killer in the dock. In his extraordinariness he was, to put it blatantly, a shame to the human race. That is a cliché, perhaps even a philistine formulation, but it is also the only, and the exact, truth about Eichmann. Arendt shrank from that formulation. She refused to concur; as a "dissenter," as an "original," she refused to concur. She was not bold enough; she lacked the courage for it. To have reiterated what lay in the clear perception of the "decent opinion of mankind"—in the communal conscience, so to speak, of all the world—would scarcely stand as an original idea; indeed, it would have been banal. Everyone felt and said that Nazi evil was extraordinary; what everyone feels and says is, by definition, banal. Hence Arendt's "original" formulation—the ascription of that irritating banality to Eichmann.

I bring up Hannah Arendt's Eichmann because I sense in Calisher a belief that dissent *in itself* is ennobling. It should not surprise that no strong voice of intellect wants to join a chorus; yet Arendt's "single voice," set against the obvious, ended in distortion and untruth: and in an environment, as I have said, of entire freedom, where speaking the obvious is not punishable. I conclude, then, that for free writers—for writers who hope to distinguish themselves by the single voice—*not* to dissent is sometimes the way of bravery. (For instance, it undoubtedly takes more courage these days for free intellectuals to defend Israel's crushing of the PLO's totalitarian military empire in Lebanon than to assault it. Yet it is those who attack Israel's defeat of the PLO—and among American intellectuals they are the majority by far—who call themselves "dissenters.")

By contrast, it is "easy" to be noble under totalitarianism—that is, it's easy to figure out how to do it and what the right issue is. There is only one way to go—against the regime. Hell is all around, and the answer is in the problem, because the problem encompasses every detail of living. But in freedom, in a mental life not eaten away by censorship, with no one looking over your shoulder, surrounded by a thousand untrammeled choices, bravery is perforce more complex and harder to sort out. To begin with: bravery in a free context needs definition. Where there is no freedom, bravery can have one definition only: the push toward freedom. When life has become onerously reductive, then freedom is the only issue and is instantly seen to be the right issue. Living at ease in freedom, you

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have the obligation to choose the right issue, and to choose it without the helpful pressure of a cultural commissar.

But there is one more point. If it is easy to know, under totalitarianism, which way to go to enact dissent, it is also just possible, even under tyranny, to willfully miss the boat by standing, Arendt-style, against authenticity—against the obvious. Arendt's "dissent," for which the only penalty was enraged outcry, can also be characterized as an act of conciliation with the oppressor's intent; after all, as the quotation from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* itself makes clear, Hitler wanted the disappearance of Jews from ordinary society to seem a commonplace and banal thing. So an apparent act of dissent—even one (unlike Arendt's) conducted when in danger of all the horrifying appurtenances of oppression—may in fact be an act of conciliation with the enemy's deepest matrix. I am thinking, in this connection, of Joseph Brodsky, whom George Steiner counts among those Soviet writers who have produced "a literary output which is truly fantastic in its formal virtuosity and compulsion of spirit." Brodsky has a lifetime of expression before him still and may undertake turnings no one can predict. Yet until now he has disappointed—not, surely, in his majestic gifts, but rather in the quality of his dissent, which is strangely flawed by a failure of historical intelligence. That the Soviet apparatus has been cruel to Brodsky—he was convicted of "social parasitism" and sentenced to five years at hard labor in Arkhangelsk—no rational mind would think to deny; a sense of disappointment in Brodsky's dissent by no means diminishes or demotes the pained respect due his great suffering. Indeed, the conditions of his oppression, though no longer physical or political, must in some nuanced manner continue on American soil, since a poet forcibly removed from the full daily and societal and broadly shared literary experience of his native language is without doubt in a state of cultural deprivation; the consequences of the initial persecution may in effect be unremitting.

But what disappoints in Brodsky is that, though he regards himself as a dissenter and is indisputably regarded as one by the Soviet apparatus, both sides are mistaken. I take a dissenter to be someone who wishes to separate himself from what has become overwhelmingly perilous to his cultural sanity and in certain circumstances threatening to his actual life. Brodsky's christological leanings, however, reveal a confidence in Russia old and new. At bottom his christological poems are a tribute to, not a dissent or separation from, the very sources of Soviet anti-Semitism that victimized and exiled him, an anti-Semitism both derived from and abetted by Christian theology and by the social and historical consequences of Christian triumphalism. Even in modern Russia, those consequences, for Jews, were unusually severe: France had Dreyfus, but Russia had pogroms. Dissent cannot mean going with the grain of a thousand years of a ceaselessly punitive majority culture brought punctiliously up-to-date by the Soviets. Having been tormented by a vindictively anti-Semitic regime, Brodsky follows the Mandelstams in declining to stand as a Jew. When Nadezhda Mandelstam—whose *Hope Against Hope* is surely one of the monumental documents of what we mean when we speak of bravery—is buried in a Russian Orthodox cemetery with priests in attendance, I conclude that, like Brodsky, she nevertheless ends in intimate collusion with her persecutors, despite Ossip Mandelstam's, and her own, tragic victimization as abused "dissenters."

(Calisher's report, I observe, offers only a single allusion to all those missing Jews—ghosts and phantoms—who seem not to be present at the long, shining tables of Eastern European intellectuals: "they wanted to go," ironically quoted. But where *are* the Jews? Berlin, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest—in these cities Jewish intellectuals once teemed. Were all her encounters wholly *judenrein*? Or did she meet a Jew or two and not recognize him? Were the Jews hiding their identities? Was she herself seen only as a generalized, or standardized, American, and

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not once inquired after as an American Jew? I find this aspect of her journey whited-out, not *there*; erased; censored.)

Finally, as for America: I am entirely content that writers carry no weight, have no influence, are regarded as worthless when compared to computer experts, have no chance for any hero's acclaim, don't have a writers' union, lack (but don't miss) the "huddling toward Parnassus on a cold winter's night," are ignored by the government, stand singly and in isolation, and, especially, go unacknowledged as "enunciators of the powers of life."

My understanding of being a writer in America is this: as long as nobody owes me anything (support, stature, attention, recognition, homage, dignity, diplomatic posts, a fancy clubhouse, respect as an incarnation of Precious Values), I don't have to owe anybody anything either. That, I take it, is the meaning of writer's freedom. It rests me to be in a country where the connections between books and life are not, thank God, "real." I am glad not to be listened to—not only because (as Calisher dared to point out in her "grim exchange") I'm not imprisonable for saying anything I damn please, but also because, in a free country, there are plenty of other voices that I don't want to listen to either; and no one's going to make me. It isn't always as clear and bright as billboards what there is to dissent from; I have to figure that out for myself, in a complicated justice-seeking muddle of my own. Steiner quotes Borges as having remarked that "censorship is the mother of metaphor." True, affirms Calisher: in the Soviet orbit they "speak double." Not to knock Aesop, a good writer; but I am glad to get the mother's milk of metaphor from some other muse.

Writers gain nothing from being respected, important, famous. The work itself then becomes problematical; more difficult; endowed with the unendurable burden of a "public." Celebrity-writers, even those who enjoy their fame, consistently complain about how celebrity inhibits access to imagination and experience. All this, however, is from the writer's point of view. From society's point of view the case is worse. If all the great human values are to be brought to bear on the frail point of a pen . . . but I don't know how to end this sentence, at least not in words; in body language, it ends in a shudder. Literature is not everything; it does not fill the world, nor should it; it is not a society's salvation, and writers should not be mistaken for prophets. For myself, I want neither Arendt nor Brodsky as prophet; and not Solzhenitsyn; and not Pasternak; and not Mailer, Styron, Roth, Paley, Oates; and not Drabble, Lessing, Gordimer; and not García-Márquez.

Calisher concludes by asking whether it is treasonable to think that the "single voice" may be "not enough." Certainly she is one of those upon whom, as James famously put it, "nothing is lost" (except when she chooses); her spirited noticings and questionings can never be "treasonable." There is no decency she would willingly betray. But yes, the single voice *is* enough. Without glory, plan, or program. And ad hoc. Look, it had better be enough—more would be idolatrous lie. When writers become symbols, the shuddering begins.

At a certain remove

by Richard Wilbur

Though it's more than twenty years since I visited Eastern Europe under a cultural-exchange program, I recognize what Hortense Calisher so well describes: the long tables, the wary faces, the long toasts or introductions, the survivor with his tired subtlety, the government man with his top-sergeant heartiness. I remember the same boasts of large editions sold out in a day, the head-shaking over the trashiness of American culture, the prudent and incredible statements—as when a distinguished novelist told me that he had been grateful to have his work red-penciled by a head of state. At the same time, and at some distance from the long tables, I recall talking as person to per-

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son, writer to writer, with people whose devotion to letters and to the "literary-scholarly tradition" was quite separable from current politics; I recall, too, three people quietly reciting in concert, as we sat in a crowded hotel dining room, the early poems of a writer not in favor. It was these people, and not the ideologues, who gave me a sense of why writers are so esteemed in certain countries of the East.

Robert Graves, speaking in Budapest in 1970, extravagantly declared that there are only three countries in Europe "where the name of poet is everywhere honored rather than ridiculed"—Ireland, Wales, and Hungary. Hungarian poets, he said, have an unmatched advantage, "their language and their myths being completely different from any other. Thus they cannot get lost under the domination of neighboring powers." I connect that with what was said to Miss Calisher at one of those writers union gatherings: "[Our literature] is small. Not in a world language. We try to keep it alive." And I connect it with what a poet said to me once in Tbilisi: "Georgian culture has survived many overlords; it will survive the Russians too." It seems to me inevitable that in a small country with a distinctive tongue and character, the writer will more securely express and enlarge the common consciousness than elsewhere he might do, and that he will therefore be "real" and authoritative to his countrymen in the sense which Miss Calisher intends. He will "speak their language," articulate their values, usably enrich them. It is not writers unions which give writers weight and pertinence; rather they exploit that weight and pertinence. Even if the "Balkan" states were democracies, their writers would differ in public status from ours.

I react wistfully, as Miss Calisher does, to the French farmer's salute to letters; though such a man may not himself be a great reader, he testifies to an ancient feeling, long predating popular literacy, that the writer does a fundamental job in society. That feeling is not unheard-of here, but it is rarer, and I think that some of the reasons are obvious: our huge, diverse, ethnically jumbled and forever altering country does not have a deep-founded collective reality in relation to which the writer can seem widely functional. Peter Taylor's stories of the changing South are wonderful and true, but they do not interpret Miami. Wright Morris's superb realizations of the Middle West have nothing much to do with Newark. I think that Robert Frost was the last American writer to be taken as representative of us all: because of his excellence, his patriotism, his venerability, his mentor style, his stemming from our British and New England origins, he seemed suitably a friend of presidents and could go as a species of ambassador to Russia.

Serious writers are most "real," in America, within a widespread network consisting of colleges, universities, foundations, academies, and elite publications. *Time* magazine recognized this fact rather baldly a few years ago when it based a brisk survey of significant contemporary poetry on sales figures from college bookstores. When I was young, it was usual to think of educational institutions as sheltered from the general life of the country; obviously that idea is less valid now, yet academia and its associated institutions still exist at a certain remove, and this has its effect on the current literature which they increasingly sponsor, interpret, and evaluate. Most of our fiction and poetry issues from a dispersed community which is migratory, cosmopolitan, learned, sophisticated, and somewhat ingrown. This has its advantages and its disadvantages, neither of which I could hope to account for in this space; but it is, in any case, the situation.

There is, of course, an extra-academic reading public in America; and we exaggerate, perhaps, the breadth and depth of actual reading in the Old World: I cannot forget the "reading-room" of a high-toned château-hotel in France, which contained nothing but movie-magazines and a television. But the question is not whether Americans or others read or do not read; the question is, how is the American writer regarded? We might like it if our society were so coherent and traditional as to let us feel that, by tak-

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ing up the pen in earnest, we became the necessary voices, celebrants, and consciences of a people. We must settle for something less, or less simple, than that. Meanwhile I do not envy East European writers their dangerous importance and their throttled authority, and I am glad that my country, if chaotic, is free.

Hortense Calisher replies:

I am pleased that such a small piece has evoked some distinguished attention. I must reply to all, or to none.

I am most grateful for Richard Wilbur's warm, solidly gracious account, with whose considerations I am much in agreement, not the least with those on the place of the academic community, of which I am now and again a member. I have often defended the university as being as much a part of the "real" world as any other, once concluding: "Fashionably considered, the university is not a part of going 'life' at all . . . but I find it impossible to exclude at least from tentative reality any place where so many people are."[1] Since the narrator in "The long, shining table" was visiting universities, I took as implicit the importance of the university's function to writers. While I do find that function "at a certain remove," I also find Mr. Wilbur's remarks most valuable.

If after reading "The long, shining table" William Barrett is still "confused" as to whether I might hanker for a "corporate" existence as a writer, I cannot hope to reassure him otherwise here. Certainly he does confuse those difficulties and prides of American writers characterized by me as "lone" in relation to their country with what he instructs is the essential "loneliness" of the writer confronted with "the blank page." Confronting that page, with all literature and all writers at one's back, is where I feel least lonely of all.

Cynthia Ozick, for whom all roads lead to us Jews and only there, plainly wished to write her own article. I am not always able to follow her argument, whose method is to pose two sides of the question as suitable to herself and then cry "Both sides are wrong." I believe she thinks herself merely to be applying to others the same severe casuistry she would to her own principles—though perhaps without any notion that we might not be in the same need. She must know that by "honor" I would not mean "honors" or "celebrity" (her bubble gum word) and that by "real" I could not mean either real goods or emoluments. Casuistry is a process which works much by repudiation and by its own tapemeasure. If by her standards the Mandelstams would not qualify for grace, then neither indeed would I. There is a fierce parochialism at work here, ranging beyond the concerns of almost any piece, unless one concedes that to be Jewish with Ozick obsessively measures all ethic, conduct, content, and style. Her intolerance toward other Jews, and indeed other writers, is breathtaking. One is scarcely sorry to hear she holds literature so low in the world—being hesitant to inquire of such general invidiousness what it might love. It has been said that she would have had to repudiate her own early work (*Trust*) in order to verge so far. If so, those of us who have not had to do such a thing may better understand her zeal. Still, when a writer worries so about how brave people are buried, I tend to give less weight to her judgment on how we any of us live.

Stanislaw Barańczak's heartening comment is a just reminder that another literature, and writers steadily pursuing it, exist outside officialdom. My account was intentionally limited to what the state visitor sees. That is always oversimplified, both here and abroad. But surely "The long, shining table" implies clearly and often that the existence of such a table and its power was much less than everything. Thoreau in the classroom, disingenuous questions on censorship? Forbidden books appearing out of thin air? And of course, the poet we took to the table itself.

1 "The Writer, Being and Doing," *The American Scholar,* reprinted in the autobiographical memoir *Herself.*

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I was naturally most aware in the country I knew best. Though none of my Yugoslav friends handed me *samizdat,* I knew of books and plays held back or finally seeing the light of day. But the less so could I write about these, or identify writers who were out of favor. Months after our return from Europe, the poet we had taken to his own union came here, reporting that this act, plus our knowledge of his work, had rehabilitated him enough to get permission to stay here for a stated time. We did not feel samaritan over the fact that American connections had facilitated this, or mull whether he was being gotten rid of or approved. As our doughty friends take these things for granted except to report the outcome, so must we. Some of them sit at that table. Some do not.

I had a book published once in Poland. Small and beautiful, two copies arrived. I never knew what else became of it. Last month a Pole resident here told me he was in Warsaw the week it was published, in what would be a large edition for here, quickly sold out, since the lines at the bookshop had been long. We joked about how people might have joined the line hoping for gloves or coffee and then been fobbed off with a book. But in neither case—either of such a lineup for a book or such cavalier lack of information (much less money) to author—could it have happened here.

One uses irony at risk, but the paradoxes of a writer's world invite it. Mr. Barańczak's phrase, "the small, battered desk," is a far more compelling image than my table. Yet surely he may suspect that the destiny of that desk and its user, and the significance of each to either side of the Atlantic, but perhaps in particular to my own, is what I was writing about.

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Music

Wagner: writing the wrongs

by Philip Winters

This month marks the hundredth year since Wagner's death, the start of a centennial celebration that will have opera houses, concert halls, and broadcast facilities throughout the world resounding with his works. Paralleling these sonic observances will be an activity that has become an adjunct to realizing the music, to wit, the writing of words. Innumerable millions of words have already explained, attacked, and defended Wagner's life and works for a century and a half, and the flood of utterance is sure to continue unabated this year with an abundant production of commemorative volumes, magazine articles, program books, and liner notes, to which should be added the centenary output of conferences, speeches, and seminars, all apparently welcome to a never satiated public appetite for writing on Wagner.

This verbal torrent began with Wagner himself, whose loquacity in person was well complemented by an unending prolificity in print: his prose and verse fill sixteen volumes in the popular German edition. But Wagner's own words constitute a mere rivulet compared to the roaring ocean of verbiage that streamed from the presses in the composer's lifetime. Thousands of volumes and pamphlets dealing with the Wagnerian phenomenon crammed the bookshops of Europe, an accumulation of reading matter devoted to a single person that is said to be unrivaled, save for the bibliographies associated with the names of Jesus and Napoleon.

It is with an awareness then of these veritable libraries of volumes, which have amassed around a man who happened to compose music in the last century, that we must brace ourselves for the bound and unbound explications, assessments, and commentaries that are certain to issue forth in this Wagner year. How much of all this will be of any value can be estimated from the proportion of useful stuff in the precentennial horde, which is, alas, the smallest fraction. For it is the sad and sobering state of affairs that most of what has been written on Wagner is founded on mistake and misapprehension. Here, then, is a further contribution to the word-pile on Wagner, a retrospective examination of some fundamental elements in the general discourse on the life and works of Richard Wagner, a survey that may also serve as a caveat to this year's production and as a sort of prolegomenon to any future Wagner-writing.

The errors that beset writing on Wagner have not to do with those small details of biography or minute niceties of interpretation, but rather with basic conceptions. This can be seen in the following quotation from Donald Jay Grout's *A Short History of Opera* (2nd ed., Columbia University Press, 1965), a universally adopted textbook that has been used to educate several generations of university students:

> The doctrines of *Oper und Drama* are best exemplified in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* ("The Ring of the Nibelungs"), which consists of

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> four consecutive dramas: *Das Rheingold* ("The Rhine Gold"), shorter than the others, and a prelude to them; *Die Walküre* ("The Valkyrie"); *Siegfried;* and *Götterdämmerung* ("The Twilight of the Gods") [p. 403].

We are here concerned not with the rightness or wrongness of the best exemplification of the doctrines of *Oper und Drama,* or with any other deep discussion of Wagner's "theories," his cosmogony, cosmology, or anything else equally awesome, but with something far less grand: the accurate putting into English of the title of what is after all the composer's principal work. It is, of course, *The Ring of the Nibelung,* that is, the singular "Nibelung," not "Nibelungs," and this point is fortunately not one of the vexed questions of musicology. Yet how ubiquitous is this "The Ring of the Nibelungs," found as it is not only in Professor Grout's textbook, but in many other texts placed on college reading lists and, what is even worse, in works of reference. For example, Leslie Orrey's *A Concise History of Opera* (Thames & Hudson, 1972, p. 163), Rey M. Longyear's *Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in Music* (Prentice-Hall, 1973, p. 173), and Westrup and Harrison's *The New College Encyclopedia of Music* (rev. Wilson, W. W. Norton, 1976) all refer the reader to "The Ring of the Nibelungs." And this mistranslation proliferates from the bookshelf onto myriad record jackets and into album booklets, and thence out over the airwaves where, as dross often does, the misbegotten "The Ring of the Nibelungs" reverberates far more sonorously than its less imposing, but correct, counterpart.

To confuse matters further, some writers choose a hybrid form, "The Ring of the *Nibelungen,*" mixing English and German, as in the *Random House Encyclopedia* (1977) or in the advertisements for the new Boulez-led Bayreuth recording; in these cases the plural "Nibelungs" is obviously suggested. The apparent difficulty here is in the plural look and sound of "*Nibelungen*"; but preceded by the article *des* it can be no other than the genitive singular, "of the Nibelung." Even if we were to leave aside the declension of German articles and nouns, can it be that Grout and company, the textbook writers, encyclopedia contributors, and other purveyors of so-called "information" have quite clearly mistaken the very meaning of Wagner's tetralogy? *The Ring of the Nibelung* was the name given to the still embryonic work late in 1852, when the texts of its four constituent dramas were more or less finally fixed, and which remained unchanged throughout the more than twenty years of its composition, its being laid aside, and its being taken up again. If, as Goethe has Faust remark, we may read the essence of a thing in its name, then Wagner's title provides for its peruser the one essential stage prop, the ring, and its one fashioner, Alberich, the Nibelung.

Now, Wagner's Alberich, who in performance after performance of *Das Rheingold* is denied by the daughters of the Rhine and then tricked by Wotan and Loge into surrendering his ring, may not be everyone's favorite *"Ring"* personality; but whenever he treads the boards in what is arguably the most ambitious work of art of the nineteenth century, he does so, like those who sing the parts of Rigoletto or Octavian, in the all-important title role. Alberich, the dwarf who rises above his meager station only to enslave others, emerges therefore as the protagonist, the chief "actor" of the tetralogy who triggers awful consequences for his fellow *dramatorum personae.* A small fact that is perhaps most usefully remembered as we slog through the next socialist, Marxist, or neo-Jungian analysis of the *"Ring"* is that it is *Alberich's* ring that all the fuss is over. The Wagner commentators in the months to come who may deem the ring to be the common property of a host of "Nibelungs" are hereby warned: before we begin to entertain great and profound thoughts about a work of art, we should convince ourselves that, in just the most preliminary ways, we comprehend it.

Writers on Wagner face pitfalls not only in handling the German language; they are

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wrestled down in a virtual underbrush when it comes to German life and customs of the nineteenth (or any other, for that matter) century. One persistent misunderstanding, laughable were it not lamentable, has to do with a significant section of Wagner's biography, the part concerned with his professional activity after he re-settled in Dresden in 1842 following the successful première there of *Rienzi.* What, indeed, was Wagner's official position in Dresden until he had to leave the city in 1849? Here is Westrup and Harrison's *The New College Encyclopedia of Music:*

> Both of these [*Rienzi* and *Der fliegende Holländer*] were accepted for performance at Dresden, where Wagner was appointed assistant conductor in 1842.

A more recent (1980) reference work, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* describes Wagner's appointment somewhat differently:

> With some reluctance, yielding to the persuasions of Weber's widow, he accepted on 2 February 1843 the position of conductor at Dresden.

Was Wagner appointed assistant conductor in 1842 and/or conductor in 1843? As if this confusion were not enough, here is another version of this bit of biographical lore in the article on Wagner in Percy A. Scholes's *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* (rev. Ward, Oxford University Press, 1966):

> Success in Dresden led to his appointment as court music director . . . .

Finally, here is Professor Grout again, but in his other widely adopted textbook, *A History of Western Music* (3rd ed., rev. Palisca, W. W. Norton, 1980):

> The success of these two works [*Rienzi* and *Der fliegende Holländer*] led to Wagner's being appointed director of the Opera at Dresden . . . . [p. 628].

The seeker after this small datum respecting Wagner's career would be justifiably astonished to glean from these four authorities no fewer than four job descriptions. *Quot homines, tot opiniones,* and we are reminded of Senator Sam Ervin's comment on the general unreliability of human testimony during the Watergate hearings when, stopping the proceedings, he riveted his audience with a homespun biblical lesson, citing from memory the four Gospel-writers' divergent views on the wording of the simple inscription placed above Jesus' cross. But, while it is possible that at least one of the Gospel-writers did get the phraseology of that inscription exactly right, in the case of the four Wagner-writers quoted above (and for each of the four there are easily forty more such "authorities"), not one of them is correct with respect to Wagner's employment in Dresden. To be sure, if we consult *the* authority, that is, Wagner himself, in a page or two of his autobiography and in a few of his letters, we would have the proper facts: that Wagner on February 2, 1843 (140 years ago this month), was appointed neither assistant conductor, nor conductor, nor music director, nor director of the opera, but court *Kapellmeister.*

Reaching for the German-English dictionary at this point avails naught; for the usual definition of *Kapellmeister,* "conductor," is altogether inadequate. Surely, the *Kapellmeister* conducts, but this has as much significance as saying that a professor "teaches." The wealth of connotation in these titles, with the evocation of accomplishment, honor, an envied standing in the community, and then of a certain rigidity and even stuffiness, is wholly lost in the flat lexical equivalents, "teacher," "conductor." An old adage holds that the dictionary is a dangerous book, and it is never truer than when trying to use it to fathom the cultural traditions of other times and other places. The naïve belief that every locution in one language goes directly into another in a neat, discrete word-package is responsible for those wrongheaded "Englishings" that seem to cause the originals to emit a collective cry:

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"But we are not you!" The *Thomaskirche* in Leipzig, where Wagner was baptized and where Bach had been *Cantor* ninety years earlier, is not "St. Thomas' Church," your friendly Anglo-American house of worship around the corner. Nor is *Kapellmeister* "conductor"; the word, *pace* Cassell's and the rest, is really untranslatable.

The grief that writers on music have come to when forced to cope with *Kapellmeister* and its constituent parts is limitless. At the risk of picking on Professor Grout, here is another passage from *A Short History of Opera:*

> The Grail music [in *Parsifal*], on the other hand, is diatonic and almost churchlike in style. The very opening theme of the prelude (the Last Supper motif), a single-line melody in free rhythm, is reminiscent of Gregorian chant; the Grail motif is an old Amen formula in use at the Dresden Royal Chapel when Wagner conducted there. [p. 421]

What "Chapel?" Grout, like so many others, has taken *Königliche Kapelle,* which is nothing more than the "Royal *Orchestra*," to be some sort of religious institution. But this is just another of the "chapels," "chapel-masters," and so on that help form the slag-heap of mistranslated German sources. The first page of the current English version of Anton Schindler's *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (W. W. Norton, 1972, with the title unhelpfully rendered "Beethoven As I Knew Him") informs its readers:

> His grandfather, Ludwig van Beethoven, was probably born in Maestricht, where the family name still persists. He was a bass singer, then director of the Electoral choir in Bonn . . . .

We can only imagine the grandson's fury at seeing his revered ancestor described for posterity as "director of the Electoral choir." But Schindler wrote that the elder Ludwig van Beethoven had been "*Capellmeister in der curfürstlichen Capelle zu Bonn*," which is quite a different matter.

The case of Beethoven sheds much light on the problems of translating this word, so prevalent in the historiography of European music. It is a little-known fact of Beethoven's life that he long harbored the ambition to be, like his grandfather, a *Kapellmeister.* In 1808 he almost abandoned Vienna for Kassel to accept the offer of the King of Westphalia, Napoleon's brother Jérôme Bonaparte, to be his *Kapellmeister.* And in 1809, while Beethoven's friends in the aristocracy were arranging for an annuity to keep the composer resident in Vienna, he urged them to obtain for him the title of imperial *Kapellmeister.* Bring this into English as "Beethoven hoped to be a conductor," and his recurrent, atavistic wish fades into meaningless absurdity.

Bach and Haydn had been *Kapellmeister.* Leopold Mozart had risen to be *Vize-Kapellmeister* in service to the Archbishop of Salzburg, but his great son never attained so lofty a distinction. In his ten years in Vienna, Wolfgang Amadé Mozart achieved only the lower rank of *Kammermusikus,* though he was frequently given to mild fibbing on theater posters and playbills by styling himself "Imperial and Royal *Kapellmeister.*" In 1826 Franz Schubert unsuccessfully petitioned the imperial court to consider him for the vacant post of *Vize-Kapellmeister.* Thus the *curricula vitarum* of that formidable Viennese triumvirate—Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert—never contained this openly desiderated official title. (For most of their active years in Vienna, the *Kapellmeister* was the now all-too-well-known Antonio Salieri.) Yet, with none of the struggle of his Viennese brethren in art, Richard Wagner became a *Kapellmeister,* though many of the textbook-writers and encyclopedists would have him earning a living in Dresden as "director of the opera" and "music director."

With this latter term writers on Wagner generally find themselves on treacherous footing. For in Dresden, a *Musikdirektor* was, paradoxically, not a "music director," in the ordinary sense of the English words. In that city a musician, subordinate to the *Kapellmeister,* with sundry responsibilities in the opera house including the occasional con-

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ducting assignment, was a *Musikdirektor* (not to be confused with the *Generalmusikdirektor* in other localities). The fact is, when Wagner was offered this inferior post as provisional to his eventual appointment as *Kapellmeister,* he refused it. That Wagner never held the title of *Musikdirektor* in Dresden, however, has not prevented a multitude of "authorities"—among them: Homer Ulrich, *Music: A Design for Listening* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970, p. 251); Robin May, *A Companion to the Opera* (Hippocrene Books, 1977, p.102); Don Michael Randel, comp., *Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music* (Harvard University Press, 1978); and *The New Columbia Encyclopedia* (Columbia University Press, 1975)—from saying he did.

Even as *Kapellmeister,* though, Wagner had little authority in the Dresden opera house. He had to contend with his colleague, Karl Gottlieb Reissiger, who was the senior *Kapellmeister* (and who conducted the première of *Rienzi*), and, among others, the disputatious concertmaster, Karl Lipinski (to whom Schumann dedicated his *Carnaval*). Above all of them was the *Intendant* ("General Manager"), Baron Wolf August von Lüttichau, with whom Wagner was rarely in accord. It is with a wry countenance that we read in Professor Grout's *A History of Western Music* and elsewhere (e.g., *The Larousse Encyclopedia of Music* [World Publishing Co., 1971] that Wagner was "director of the Opera at Dresden." Had it been so, and had Wagner not been so frustrated in his powerlessness in the capital of Saxony, the history of music might have been very different.

It is, after all, impossible even now to overemphasize the importance of titles in German society. When Wagner walked in the streets of Dresden, he was greeted as *"Herr Kapellmeister,"* just as he might have called out to his neighbors *"Herr Doktor"* or *"Herr Professor."* Years later, when his wife Minna returned to live out her final years in the city, she was as a matter of course addressed as *"Frau Kapellmeister."* Translate as "Mrs. Conductor" and see the hopelessness of dictionaries in differentiating between *Kapellmeister,* the holder of a title, and *Dirigent* ("conductor"), the holder of a stick. It is, for example, a persistent disfigurement of Geoffrey Skelton's translation of Cosima Wagner's *Diaries* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) that *Kapellmeister* is always rendered "conductor," since the original often imparts a tone of condescension, even contempt, to those men who, like Richard Wagner himself once, served a court or a municipality.

To the errors committed by Wagner-writers with respect to the title (and meaning) of his *chef-d'oeuvre* and to the title (and significance) of his appointment in Dresden could be subjoined a lengthy list of additional blunders, among which: that Wagner's stepfather (who may have been his actual father) was a "Jewish actor"[1] (Burbidge and Sutton, eds., *The Wagner Companion* [Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 15] and others); that Wagner was "self-taught"[2] (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica* ["Macropedia," 1975, Vol. 19, p. 517] and others); that his exile from Germany lasted fifteen years[3] (*Harvard Dictionary of Music* [Harvard University Press, 1969, s.v. "Opera"] and others with differing lengths of exile from Germany); and that the title of the last of the *"Ring"* dramas is *"Die Götterdämmerung"*

1 Though it was surmised widely (possibly by Wagner himself) that his stepfather, Ludwig Geyer, was of Jewish ancestry, it was definitely proved by genealogical research (Otto Bournot, *Ludwig Heinrich Christian Geyer, der Stiefvater Richard Wagners,* 1913) that this could not have been the case.

2 Wagner himself promoted the myth that he was a near autodidact, but his dependence on instruction was long and intensive, as clearly shown by diary entries and letters. Cf. John Deathridge, *"Wagner und sein erster Lehrmeister"* in the program book of the *Bayerische Staatsoper* (July 1979).

3 Because most of the important events in Wagner's life can be dated precisely, in the case of his flight from Germany to escape arrest, we know that he crossed the border on May 28, 1849, and returned under an amnesty on August 12, 1860; an exile of eleven years and seventy-five days.

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(*The New Columbia Encyclopedia* and others).[4]

It is an embarrassment to the educational and publishing network of music professors and textbook editors, with their legions of assistants, staffs, and committees, that these mistaken notions about Wagner have been perpetrated and perpetuated in the hundred years since his career could be chronicled in its entirety. But the above-mentioned errors pale into insignificance in the face of perhaps the most pervasive misconceptions of this great creator's work and ideas. These are the two grand phrases with which Wagner is universally identified in the overwhelming proportion of the vast mass of literature on him: *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* and "music drama."

Summary encapsulation is an ingrained practice among those who teach and perforce among those who learn. The condensation of a body of work or thought in a catch phrase is perhaps unavoidable in an age in which reading has become bothersome. If we see, for example, the name of Braque, we see "cubism" in its wake; if Debussy's is heard, "impressionism" is sure to follow. The slogans are remembered, absorption is facilitated, and thought obviated. So has it been with Wagner. Almost without exception, those who turn out books, monographs, textbook chapters, and encyclopedia entries on him dot their pages with "music drama" and *"Gesamtkunstwerk,"* thereby reducing Wagner's complex and variegated conceptions to small consistent word-bundles that can be dispatched and deployed at will. Unfortunately, what may be true (if simple-minded) for Braque and Debussy is pretentious and false for Wagner.

Let us observe how this pair of catch words is used in several representative examples. It should be noted that none of the publications cited, both above and below, is for a specialist or scholarly reader; moreover, most of these writings enjoy wide circulation, being mainstays of the college classroom and public library:

> Wagner's matured aim was the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* a fusion of all the arts in an almost religiously conceived music drama of intense seriousness and philosophic elevation . . . . (*Encyclopedia Americana* [1975, Vol. 28, p. 260])

> Wagner believed that a music drama should be a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (universal artwork) combining elements from all the arts. (Robert Hickok, *Exploring Music* [3rd ed., Addison-Wesley, 1979, p. 314])

> He brought all the arts together into what he called the "Combined-Art-Work" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), to which he devoted virtually all his attention as a composer. This was his own special type of opera ("music drama") in which the music shares honors with the drama, the philosophy, and the poetry—all provided by Wagner himself. (Joseph Kerman, *Listen* [Worth Publishers, 1972, p. 242])

> He aimed at the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* the complete work of art uniting all the arts, which for him was his form of music drama. (Robin May, *A Companion to the Opera,* p. 100)

> In Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or "total work of art," all the arts were united under the leadership of drama. (Karl H. Wörner, *History of Music* [5th ed., The Free Press, 1973, p. 385]).

These epitomes of Wagner's bequest to the progress of music are standard fare in nearly every recounting of operatic history, with slight deviations in the English rendering of *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* as either "universal," "combined," "complete," "composite," or "total work of art." And, it is *de rigueur* that this "fusion of all the arts" be linked to Wagner's vehicle for it, the "music drama." As noted, virtually every writer who discusses Wagner ultimately falls back on these verbal twins, seemingly inseparable, to delineate the pathways of opera in the mid-nine-

4 In every publication that Wagner could oversee in his lifetime, the title was always *Götterdämmerung,* without the article. This work therefore joins those other article-less compositions, *Messiah, Winterreise,* and *Pagliacci,* which are so often erroneously preceded by *"The," "Die,"* and *"I,"* respectively.

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teenth century, with the conspicuous exception of one writer: the composer himself.

All deployers of *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* and "music drama," especially those who dearly love the roll of a sesquipedalian polysyllabic Teutonism off the tongue and the self-gratifying enunciation of a genre patently superior to "opera" must face the unpleasant fact that the composer to whom they refer held those terms in explicit and utter derision, that he never used them except in rejection and disgust.

To be scrupulously accurate, though, Wagner did use, and possibly coined, *"Gesamtkunstwerk,"* but most certainly he did not apply the term to his own works in the way that pervades Wagner-writing. The seeds of *"Gesamtkunst"* date back to the foundering of Wagner's *Kapellmeister*ship in the Dresden uprising of 1849. After its failure Wagner took refuge in Switzerland and began to produce a barrage of prose, commencing with the brochures *Art and Revolution* and *The Work of Art of the Future* and culminating in his book, *Opera and Drama.* When writing the first two essays Wagner labored under the momentary impress of vaguely communistic notions (developed in Dresden discussions with his *Musikdirektor,* August Röckel, and the Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin) and was in the thrall of classical Athenian drama, especially that of Aeschylus, which he read in Droysen's translation. Out of this amalgam emerged an ideal: the work of art that was a collective enterprise, produced by a brotherhood of artists, just as Attic tragic drama had been the work of a community, a *"Gemeinschaft."* Wagner writes ecstatically of "the great Greek collective work of art" (*"das grosse griechische Gesammtkunstwerk"*),[5] lodging his complaint that with the decline of the genre, art broke up into its separate components. The Greek ideal of the unified artistic enterprise might be realized again, "not as the voluntary act of an individual, but as the necessary joint work of the men of the future" (*"nicht als die willkürlich mögliche That des Einzelnen, sondern als das nothwendig denkbare gemeinsame Werk der Menschen der Zukunft"*).[6]

In elaborating this ideal Wagner uses *"Gesammtkunstwerk"* exactly twice in *Art and Revolution,* thrice in *The Work of Art of the Future,* and then never again in the more than three decades of his voluminous prose. He himself, not being a collective, never intended to fashion a *"Gesamtkunstwerk."* Instead, in *Opera and Drama* he defined his course away from traditional "opera" as the work of a "word-tone poet," combining not *all* the arts, but merely those of dramatic poetry and music, in the person of Wagner as composer and dramatist. Thus, there is no *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* among Wagner's works, and what are staged each summer in Bayreuth are not *"Gesamtkunstwerke."* There is, however, a contemporary example of the genre in Wagner's sense of the word, and not too far from Bayreuth: the decennial production of the Passion Play at Oberammergau, in which the staging of the drama is an achievement of the community itself with no outside participants allowed.

Perhaps the culprit was the mid-nineteenth-century urge toward the all-embracing; for the notion of *"Gesamtkunst"* took hold, principally among Wagner's supporters. In 1853, led by Franz Brendel (the editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*), there was a movement afoot to launch a new journal, to be called *"Blätter für Gegenwart und Zukunft der Gesammt-Kunst"* ("Journal for Contemporary and Future *'Gesammt-Kunst'*"). Wagner had been asked to draft a statement of purpose for it, and, prodded by Liszt to get it done, he responded:

> My dear Franz, listen—once and for all—strike me out entirely as to any literary-critical enterprise. I cannot take part in any such thing anymore . . . . I have spoken about the subject under discussion so volubly and in such detail, that I am conscious of having done enough. Brendel and his associates and opponents have not read my writings even once, as they ought

5 Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen,* III, 29.

6 *Ibid.,* III, 60.

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> to be read in order to be understood. It would be entirely impossible that the fruit of all my efforts should finally emerge as this unfortunate "Sonderkunst" and "Gesammtkunst"! Therefore, if you think that the journal cannot stand without me, I have to say: good! let it cease; for then it has no purpose or value . . . . Above all, however, absolutely nothing of that wretched "Gesammtkunst" in the title! (Wagner to Liszt, August 16, 1853)

Thus Wagner on what is supposed by the authorities to be the great "fusion" and "synthesis" of "all the arts," the "complete" and "total" work of art. Most ironically, in view of the Wagnerians' virulent antipathy to him, there was one composer in the nineteenth century who meticulously and successfully controlled every aspect of his operatic *oeuvre,* the music, the words, the décor, the mise en scène, the dance, and so forth, and who in effect produced a *"Gesamtkunstwerk,"* not in Wagner's original sense, but in the beloved conception of the Wagner-writers, and that composer was . . . Meyerbeer! In the productions of *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète* at the Paris Opéra, for example, audiences did hear and view a totality, a complete entity conceived and supervised by one artist, the real *Gesamtkünstler* of Europe, a man envied (and hated) by other composers of opera, and most particularly by Wagner.

As to "music drama," perhaps the simplest way to put the term in perspective is to set down a plain list of Wagner's ten completed works for the stage, together with his own subscribed genre denominations.

Die Feen
"Romantische Oper"

Das Liebesverbot,
oder die Novize von Palermo
"Grosse komische Oper"

Rienzi,
der Letzte der Tribunen
"Grosse tragische Oper"

Der fliegende Holländer
"Romantische Oper"

Tannhäuser
und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg
"Grosse romantische Oper"

Lohengrin
"Romantische Oper"

Tristan und Isolde
"Handlung"

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
"Oper"

Der Ring des Nibelungen
"Ein Bühnenfestspiel"

Parsifal
"Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel"

What shouldn't be missed in scanning this list is that seven out of the ten works are fastened with the unexceptional appellation "opera." *Tristan und Isolde,* on the other hand, has the unique designation *"Handlung"* or "action," while *The Ring of the Nibelung* and *Parsifal* have verbal subscriptions that are connected with Wagner's aim of festival performance. The upshot, possibly uncomfortable for the multitudinous gasconaders of the term, is that Wagner never wrote a "music drama"!

Yet, inevitably, Wagnerians of Wagner's era, *plus royaliste que le roi,* coined and propagated "music drama," though their adored composer, who generally referred to his stage works as *"meine Opern,"* never used the term except in an effort to blot it out of existence. His wife Cosima recorded (diary entry for June 11, 1870) that when Nietzsche visited and read his lecture, *"Das griechische Musikdrama,"* Wagner became indignant. Finally, having seen and heard enough, Wagner published in the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* for October 1872 a brief article, *"Über die Benennung 'Musikdrama'"* ("On the term 'Music Drama'"), in which he ridiculed the term and the ill-conceived, if well-

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meaning, efforts of his loyalists.[7] Though this article has been available within the corpus of Wagner's *Schriften* for over a hundred years (eighty-five or so in English), it doesn't seem to have gotten as far as the "authorities," who tell us confidently:

> Wagner called his works "music dramas" rather than operas, to emphasize the close relationship between music and drama. (Roger Kamien, *Music: An Appreciation,* McGraw-Hill, 1976, p. 364)

> But the works Wagner wrote after *Lohengrin* are not "operas"; for them Wagner invented the term *music drama.* (Homer Ulrich, *Music: A Design for Listening,* p. 256)

> Feeling that traditional opera techniques did not do sufficient justice to the dramatic element, Wagner developed a novel treatment of opera, structure; he even coined the term *music drama* to replace the older term *opera.* (Arthur Komar, *Music and Human Experience,* Schirmer Books, 1980, p. 157)

> Particularly in his last operas . . . Wagner created a new kind of work, which he called music drama. (*Harper's Dictionary of Music,* Harper & Row, 1972).

Here we have that special brand of fatuity bred by sloth, the wilful refusal to investigate the actual writings of the author being expounded to see what in blazes he was up to. It is not only Wagner's formal prose that has been gathering dust on the shelves for more than a century; there reposes in the peace of ignorance his garrulous but informative letters, including the one to Liszt cited above refuting *"Gesamtkunst,"* which has been available since 1887 (in English since 1888). But Wagner is one of the great unread figures of history, in inverse (not to mention perverse) proportion to his popularity.

Perhaps we have no real hope of eradicating *"Gesamtkunstwerk"* and "music drama" from the Wagner-writing of the future. But headway may be possible with what is the most grievous misnomer associated with Wagner, one that goes to the kernel of what is by common consent his most influential work, *Tristan und Isolde.* Misnamed is the concluding passage known throughout opera houses and concert halls as the *"Liebestod,"* or, in its most frequent English rendering, "Love-Death."

Regrettably, the *"Liebestod"* and "Love-Death" headlines that have been printed on concert posters, program books, and record sleeves past counting constitute an awful mistake, one that distorts the essential meaning of Wagner's drama. For he never called or referred to the final passage of *Tristan* as *"Liebestod,"* but instead provided an unusual, highly evocative descriptive epithet: *"Verklärung"* or "transfiguration."

On the very last page of the score of *Tristan und Isolde,* completed August 6, 1859, the composer wrote as the stage direction following Isolde's last F-sharp: *"Isolde sinkt, wie verklärt"* ("Isolde sinks down, as if transfigured"). Subsequently, in correspondence (e.g., his letter to Mathilde Wesendonck of April 10, 1860) and elsewhere, the composer pointedly denominated this passage as Isolde's *"Verklärung."* Now it would seem that performers, stage directors, audiences, and even writers on music would have warmed to the idea of Isolde's "transfiguration." And *"Verklärung"* is a word which, indeed, has strong echoes in German musical history (*viz.,* Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* [*Death and Transfiguration*] and Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* [*Transfigured Night*]), but which has been literally forgotten in the hundred years since Wagner has been personally unable to do anything about it. For this neglect we have probably to thank Franz Liszt, who devised a piano transcription of Isolde's *"Verklärung,"* but which he uncomprehendingly entitled *"Isoldens Liebes-Tod."* It was very likely the wide sale of Liszt's *"Liebestod"* that, like cheap money, drove out the dear *"Verklärung."*

Yet, what of *"Liebestod"*? Does it have any place in *Tristan und Isolde*? Fortunately, we

7 *Ibid.,* IX, 302-8; in English, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works,* trans. William Ashton Ellis, V, 299-304.

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have a document, Wagner's own program note for a concert in Vienna on December 27, 1863, in which the introduction and conclusion of the work, the pairing now so familiar, were given. As headings for his descriptive comments, Wagner wrote:

Prelude
("Liebestod")

Closing Passage
("Verklärung").[8]

The first parenthetical identifier for the prelude is quite revelatory; for it shows that whatever is to be communicated by *"Liebestod"* is to be felt before the curtain goes up on the action itself.

A possible key to the meaning of *"Liebestod"* as Wagner wished it to be understood is provided by the source of his text, the *Tristan* of the thirteenth-century poet Gottfried von Strassburg. The prologue to that poem, introducing the world in which the doomed lovers move, contains these lines:

ihr liebes leben, ihr leides tot
ihr liebes tot, ihr leides leben
("its life of love, its death from sorrow
its death from love, its life in sorrow").

A gloss on the special use of the word *"tot,"* "death," is furnished later in Gottfried's poem:

Tristans leben und sein tot
sein lebende tot, die bluhende Isot
("Tristan's life and his death
his living death, the fair Isolde").

A special advantage that Gottfried von Strassburg enjoyed by writing in the orthography of Middle High German was the striking rhyme *"tot/Isot."* Isolde was death to Tristan, not a physical death, but a metaphorical *"lebende tot,"* a living death brought about by love, or, in Gottfried's formulation, *"liebes tot."* Moreover, it is a "death-from-love" that is brought on by separation, as Gottfried remarks:

Tristans fremde war ihr tot
("Tristan's avoidance was death to her").

Here, to be sure, Isolde does not "die," but suffers the overwhelming yearning caused by Tristan's absence. In Gottfried's, *Tristan,* as in Wagner's six and a half centuries later, the lovers are for much of the time apart, and it is then that they undergo *"Liebestod."* When the curtain rises on Wagner's "action" the lovers are spatially and temperamentally at some distance from each other. The aching, unsatisfied passion of the prelude signifies their *"Liebestod."*

A possible rejoinder to this survey of Wagnerian misnomers and misapprehensions is that it has dealt narrowly with words, mere nomenclature, and that the public and those who write for the public in the main understand Wagner and his works. But words have consequences, and it is altogether unfortunate that the essential meaning of *The Ring of the Nibelung* be missed, that in *Tristan und Isolde* the suffering in separation—the commencing *"Liebestod"*—go unappreciated, and that Isolde's final "transfiguration" be lost to audiences. It is particularly unhappy that scholars and others who write on Wagner have not, in more than a hundred years, taken pains either to discover the composer's own special and revealing terminology, or to communicate accurately terms crucial to his life and career. It is to be hoped that at least some beginning will be made in this centenary year to found a proper discourse on Wagner and his accomplishment, one in which, by taking the trouble to know what he said, our general understanding will be, so to speak, transfigured.

8 Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen,* XII, 347. *"Liebestod und Verklärung"* were also on the program of a private concert that Wagner conducted for King Ludwig II on July 12, 1865, in Munich.

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Art

Looking at Braque

by William C. Agee

Georges Braque (1882-1963) is, of course, widely acclaimed as one of the great painters of the twentieth century; indeed, he has been heralded by some as one of the greatest French artists of all time. Yet while his name is well established in the pantheon of modern artists, our actual acquaintance with and knowledge of his work, at least in this country, has been somewhat vague and incomplete. Certainly he has been less studied, and his art far less visible, than his more famous colleague Picasso, whose centenary year was celebrated in 1980 with the mammoth exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. That no retrospective was organized in 1982, Braque's centenary year, is another indication that in recent years Braque has not commanded much attention here.

Rather, two relatively small and specialized exhibitions in Washington celebrated the occasion. At the National Gallery of Art, *Braque: The Papiers Collés* consisted of thirty of the fifty-seven pasted paper collages that Braque did between 1912 and 1918. The exhibition, shown earlier in Paris, was organized jointly by the Musée nationale d'art moderne at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the National Gallery of Art.[1] It was accompanied by a scholarly catalogue that contained six essays, a welcome catalogue raisonné, and an extensive critical chronology.[2] At The Phillips Collection, where Braque was always held in high esteem by its founder, Duncan Phillips, we were presented with a survey of some forty-seven of the late paintings done from 1940 until his death in 1963.[3] The show was organized by Robert C. Cafritz, with a catalogue essay written by Herschel B. Chipp.[4] A few paintings of the Twenties and Thirties from the permanent collections of the museums were on view; they afforded at least a capsule summary of Braque's work in the intervening years between the periods covered by the two exhibitions. Each was the first of its kind, and, while one would have wished on this occasion for a full museum retrospective (the last in America was held in 1949),

1 In Paris, it was shown June 17-September 27, 1982, and in Washington from October 31, 1982 to January 16, 1983. It will not travel in the United States.

2 *Braque: The Papiers Collés,* by Isabelle Monod-Fontaine with E.A. Carmean, Jr. With contributions by Trinkett Clark, Douglas Cooper, Pierre Daix, Edward F. Fry, and Alvin Martin. Published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1982.

3 *Georges Braque: The Late Paintings (1940-1963)* was shown at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., October 9-December 12, 1982. It will be shown at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, January 1-March 15, 1983; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, April 14-June 14; and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, July 7-September 14.

4 *Georges Braque: The Late Paintings 1940-1963,* by Herschel B. Chipp, with a foreword by Laughlin Phillips, and an introduction by Robert C. Cafritz. Published by The Phillips Collection, 1982.

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the two exhibitions did enable us to focus on Braque in this country for the first time in many years.

Ever since André Salmon referred to him in 1914 as a "fervent disciple" of Picasso, there has been a lingering tendency in some quarters to think of Braque as a lesser Picasso. William Rubin's convincing argument that Braque did the first truly Cubist works in 1908 has done much to change that impression, as has the now certain knowledge that Braque did the first *papier collé*. More than anything, however, the exhibition at the National Gallery leaves no doubt of his stature. For so beautiful and authoritative are the *papiers collés* that Braque's greatness is immediately and irrefutably evident as the magnitude of his accomplishment in these years is brought home in work after work. It is as if one had forgotten just how good he can be, and, as we progress through the exhibition, we are apt to conclude that despite the acclaim bestowed on him he has, if anything, been underrated.

The technique of *papier collé* evolved, in part, from the experiments with paper constructions conducted by Braque and Picasso in the summer of 1912, as well as from certain paintings of Braque's the same year that incorporated simulated wood graining. In early September 1912, Braque purchased a roll of imitation wood-grained (*faux bois*) paper he had seen in a shop window in Avignon. By affixing strips of this paper directly to the surface in conjunction with a Cubist still life drawing, Braque created a technique that altered the direction of Cubist painting, which itself had reshaped the course of Western art. By their absolute flatness the paper strips, among other effects, purged the last traces of illusionist space that had been at the heart of Western tradition for five hundred years. The technique also enabled Braque and Picasso (who had quickly followed his colleague's initiative) to compose with a new freedom, while at the same time restoring a badly needed clarity to their art, which had become so fragmented by the end of 1911 that it was virtually impossible to decipher. Thus, through the impetus of *papiers collés,* Cubism restructured itself into its Synthetic phase, a style composed of fewer and broader shapes.

The exhibition gives us a step-by-step account of just how Braque developed this revolutionary technique that had profound consequences not only for Cubism itself but for much of subsequent art. After his first exploratory application, in which the paper strips gravitate to the edges and are clearly secondary, or adjunct, to the full, robust drawing, Braque's confidence in *papiers collés* increased quickly. Successively, he placed more reliance on the strips of paper to carry the picture, first using them as "freestanding" elements, then letting their number and complexity multiply while progressively reducing the presence of drawing. In the last of these works, done in 1914 and 1918, the collages were densely structured, covering most of the surface, with drawing limited to a few marks.

We are immersed in a lucid pictorial world characterized by a richness of surface and nuance such as has rarely been equalled in the art of this century. The finely wrought, carefully balanced articulation of these works provides compelling evidence, over and over, of the supreme craftsmanship for which Braque is justly renowned. The sure placement of any of the twelve types of paper he employed, separately or in various combinations, bespeak their "certainty," and the "simplicity of the facts" that Braque cherished in his *papiers collés.* Until well into 1914, they are fused with drawing that defines forms and their relationships with a sensitivity of touch and stroke that will satisfy the most demanding connoisseur. The resultant harmonies are such that shapes or lines drawn over a pasted paper will appear to transform the paper into a transparent surface. In other collages, the contrast of the precise, sharp edges of the paper elements play against curvilinear elements of drawn shapes in a counterpoint with myriad variations.

Braque in fact loved music, and the *papiers collés* often seem to have been composed as

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much by or for the ear as the eye. In *Bal,* 1913, the hand-lettered words *Bach-Bal-Journal,* when sounded, set off a lilting musical rhyme that is echoed visually by their disposition across the surface, as are the repeated circular shapes of the guitar. Even the graining of the *faux bois* paper, which, here as elsewhere, is placed exactingly to parallel the format of the picture, appears to transform itself into a series of expanding sound waves. Elsewhere Braque can simply use a newspaper headline incorporating the printed word *violon* as an associative sign to stand for the instrument and its sound. So, too, a newspaper masthead with *L'Echo* is juxtaposed with a clarinet, implying the repetition of sound. Or, in the 1912 *Guitar, Jou,* a delicately rendered fragment of *Journal,* indicates the root of the verb *jouer,* to play, and nudges against the instrument, seemingly bringing it to life. Rhyming words and puns also are interwoven from one work to another, as for example the play of *Bach,* which appears frequently, with *Boc* in another collage; in turn, each is played against *Braque,* always present, whether the collage is signed or not.

While Cubism is often characterized as "intellectual" (and, to be sure, the powers of the intellect inform every aspect of this art), the exhibition provides us ample opportunity to gauge the constant references to the senses that permeate Braque's art. His favored format is the still life; the ambience is often the café and the café-concert and is filled with typographic or depicted references not only to music, but to food, tobacco, ale, cognac, rum, perfume, soap, elegant clothes, and cards. In turn, it is our senses that are affected by the richness of textures, the contrast of colors (not usually associated with earlier Cubism) in the pasted papers, either in their natural state or painted, with white chalk, the black charcoal drawing, and the white surface.

Braque could move easily from classical music and high culture to a world of more popular pursuits and pleasures. Throughout these works there is a recurring use of newspaper advertisements and handbills refer-

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ring to or incorporating images of cycling—one of his favorite pastimes—motorcars and the movies, Gillette safety razors and department-store sales of furred gowns, and sewing machines. (In such references we find a source for collages by artists such as Hannah Hoch and Raoul Hausmann, who incorporated similar elements.) In at least eight of the *papiers collés,* Braque alludes to his financial situation—perhaps the contract he signed with Kahnweiler in the fall of 1912—by including pieces of newspaper that refer to money, credit, and economics. We are also treated to vivid examples of Braque's wit, which was at once amusing and puzzling, but which no less than Picasso's added to the Cubist repertoire of private jokes. In *The Mandolin,* 1914, for example, the left section of the instrument is composed of newspaper advertisements for midwives (*sage-femme*), perhaps a reference to the Cubist equation of the guitar and the female body, or to the new art that Braque and Picasso had brought into being. *Glass, Bottle, and Newspaper* of 1914, his most complex collage to date, is apparently proclaimed in a newspaper headline as the *Edition définitive.*

In every way, this is an enormously satisfying exhibition. It is marred only by the absence of the great 1918 *Musical Forms* from Philadelphia which, more than any other, shows how the patterning of collage affected the development of later Cubism, a subject treated by Mr. Carmean in his catalogue essay. The *papiers collés* restore Braque to us as a vivid, forceful presence. Their powerful and living effect is, for example, clearly evident in the planar structuring of David Smith's sculptures, *The Sentinels,* installed just outside the entrance to the Braque exhibition.

It would have been difficult to maintain this level of accomplishment under the best of circumstances, but—tragically—Braque's course was drastically altered by the war. He suffered a severe head wound and never again enjoyed full health. Only in 1917 after a long convalescence was he able to resume painting. His initial efforts were tentative, and it appears that it was not until the late Twenties that he was doing truly first-rate work again, while he continued to explore the tenets of Cubism in still lifes of broad, overlapping curvilinear shapes. Three paintings of the Twenties and Thirties in the permanent collection at the National Gallery and the 1929 masterpiece, *The Round Table,* at The Phillips Collection showed the heights he could reach during the period between the two wars.

With much of the post-1940 work dispersed in Europe, it is only rarely seen here. But one's enormous respect for Braque had led one to value these paintings even though, as it turns out, the late work was primarily known, at least to this writer, through reproduction. Thus it was with high anticipation that one visited the exhibition at The Phillips Collection, exhilarated by the earlier work, awaiting what one hoped would be the discovery of the grand summation of Braque's career. Unhappily, try as one might, the hoped for discovery does not materialize. After actually experiencing the paintings, we are left instead with the impression of an art in progressive decline. It must be added that such judgments should be tempered by the absence of five of the eight *Studios,* as well as two of the four *Billiard Tables,* the two most ambitious and important series of these years. We may need to wait until these pictures can be seen together to judge precisely Braque's achievement in these years. But on the evidence before us, including paintings from these series that are present, the late work does not measure up to the level of accomplishment reached in the best pictures of the late Twenties and Thirties. To be sure, Braque painted some very good pictures after 1940, but they seem isolated, and they are never great in the sense that the earlier work was.

Critical response to the late work has often been either sharply pro or con; but the matter is not that simple because these paintings do not form a single, homogeneous body. Braque began the Forties with a series of successful pictures, among them *The Stove* and the *Large Interior with Palette,*

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both of 1942. The intense color in the left section of *The Stove,* for example, which contains brilliant passages of painting, interjects a palpable warmth into the setting. At the same time the heavy black shadow at the right, a stark reminder of the war, forecasts the onset of a major pictorial problem. For in paintings such as *Kitchen Table with Griddle,* of 1943-44, the black takes over the picture, choking it off and rendering the surface inert.

By comparison, what accounts for the success of the *Billiard Tables*—the largest in the series, done in 1949, is the best painting in the exhibition—are the open areas around the objects which give them a space that allows them life-giving breath. They are able to expand and amplify themselves, allowing the sure, deft articulation of the surface that characterized the pre-1940 still lifes and, in another context, his Cubist painting of 1910-1914. Everything in the large *Billiard Table* is in constant movement and flux, imbuing it with the kind of vitality that is missing all too often in the late work. Whereas the glory of Braque's painting once resided in the unity and articulation of the surface, in much of the late work he seemed to confuse and replace clarity of definition with an ever-increasing materialization of the space and surface. We are first made aware of this process in the *Reclining Woman* of 1930-52 where, because of an effort to emulate the subtle facture of 1910-11 Cubism, the surface is overworked and an abrupt disjunction between the left and right sections virtually breaks the picture in half. It is most apparent, however, in *Studio VI,* of 1950-51, where the surface is so clotted that whole sections of the picture are blotted out by the heavy blacks and objects are rendered inert. Braque believed he was painting space, making it material, but in this quest he lost the modulated touch that earlier had informed his painting. All his life, Braque fought to ward off the facile, but in the late works the cost was an arduous and labored type of picture.

As a result, it became increasingly difficult for him to maintain the precision of balance and unity that infused his earlier work. Instead, we encounter pictures which, because of their encrusted surfaces, we can only read part by part. The *Studio IX* of 1952-53/56, for example, divides itself into areas that seem to remain separate and apart in our field of vision. Thereafter, we find pictures in which certain parts recall his earlier brilliance, but they are juxtaposed with clearly unresolved passages that finally doom the painting. The wall at the rear of *The Open Window* (1952), for example, is a model of clarity and sureness, but the table and objects on it seem to dissolve in a jumble in front of us in a way that never happened in the pre-1940 work.

Braque had done a few landscapes in the Twenties and Thirties, returning to the genre in 1952 in a series of small paintings that he continued until his death. One wishes he had chosen to pursue them earlier, and more extensively, before his health failed him so completely. They at first have a welcome openness, space, and breathing room that take us out of the increasingly closed and oppressive world of the studios and the interiors. They break away from the canons of late Cubism that Braque had persisted in exploring and give him what we feel was the potential for a new pictorial freedom. Thus, in *The Shower* of 1952, we find areas of independent drawing that move over the surface with a sense of invention and liveliness that had become all too rare. The pearly greys and precisely controlled and modulated surfaces in two seascapes of 1952 have a tonic freshness that make apparent the powers he still possessed. Yet within three years he had allowed the paint on the surfaces of these small landscapes again to build up, often in dense blacks, once more closing off the picture to the airiness that his work needed so badly. This seemingly compulsive need to load the picture reached its extreme in the 1958 *Seashore,* where even the frame is covered with the same impenetrable black pigment that fills most of the canvas, reducing the picture to a single leaden weight. These unfortunate episodes make us realize just what a miracle

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Matisse's late work is, as well as explaining a good deal about the lengths Picasso went to in order to insure that his art stayed open and alive in his last years.

There is, of course, something very sad about all this. But, as Pierre Schneider has observed, there is about these paintings an almost cosmic sense of loss that lends grandeur to Braque's late work. It is to Braque's immense credit that we sense he started each canvas anew, challenging himself again and again; he constantly walked a narrow line, refusing to give in to the ingratiating. For this and many other reasons, it is a compelling and engrossing exhibition. In his later years he created many complex, even haunting pictures, and, if many of them fail, we cannot help but remember that they fail by the very highest standards, the very standards that he himself in large measure had established for the art of the twentieth century.

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Books

Music in Naziland

by Dana Mack

Until now, the subject of Nazi cultural policy and its effect upon German musical life has been relatively ignored. The reasons are obvious: there have been international reputations to protect, and there has been a general reluctance to endanger the high regard in which German musical life has been held for two hundred and more years. But recently a German musicologist has published a book that attempts to correct this historical amnesia. In *Musik im NS-Staat,*[1] Fred K. Prieberg has brought into focus both the methods and the results of the Nazis' attempt to wed music to totalitarian politics.

Prieberg, who is the author of several publications dealing with the theme of *Musikpolitik,* is no stranger to the consideration of musical life under totalitarianism. Among his past works are studies entitled *Musik in der Sowjetunion* (1965) and *Musik im anderen Deutschland* (1967). His new work, the product of twenty years of source gathering, is based on 329 interviews and letters and research in 192 archives. It has received considerable attention in Germany and Austria.

The Nazis came to power at a time when German musical life was particularly rich. Interwar Germany enjoyed the talents of such native composers as Richard Strauss, Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill, Carl Orff, and Hans Pfitzner; and it attracted such Austrians as Arnold Schoenberg and Franz Schreker. German concert life, graced by such performers as Otto von Klemperer, Bruno Walter, and Erich Kleiber, was the most envied in Europe, and extended from the great opera houses of Berlin and Frankfurt-am-Main to the modern music festivals of Baden-Baden and Donaueschingen. Most important, Weimar Germany boasted a cosmopolitan audience unsurpassed in cultural sophistication.

Yet the musical culture of interwar Germany was not without its problems. First inflation and then depression affected the economic prosperity of concert life. The rapid rise of political and social anti-Semitism permeated the cultural arena where so many Jews had achieved prominence. In a purely aesthetic area, large sections of the audience and even of the professional community were vocal in their hostility toward the avant-garde music increasingly thrust upon them in German concert halls and opera houses and on German radio.

Into this situation entered Hitler and the Nazis in January of 1933. The Nazis soon set about coordinating every aspect of German life under the direction and management of the state—a process which they called *Gleichschaltung:* literally, "putting into the same gear."

As Prieberg shows, the overriding initial aim of Nazi musical policy was *Entjudung,* the removal of Jews and their music from German concert halls and academic institu-

1 *Musik im NS-Staat,* by Fred K. Prieberg. Fischer Taschenbruch Verlag, 499 pages

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tions. But *Entjudung* was not all the Nazis had in mind; the process of *Gleichschaltung* did not end with the dismissal of Jews from musical posts and the blacklisting of Jewish composers' music. The Nazis lost no time in establishing administrative institutions designed to integrate German music and musicians for the purposes of the National Socialist state.

The chief of these institutions was the *Reichsmusikkammer* (State Music Chamber), a division of Josef Goebbels' *Reichskulturkammer*. Policies initiated on behalf of the *Musikkammer* were meant to be official government policies. As such, they radiated to provinces, towns, and villages where the regime built a hierarchically organized bureaucracy which busied itself with concerns ranging from concert management and musical repertoire to the choosing of artistic personnel, the setting of salaries, and the establishment of ensembles and schools. Private performing institutions thus lost their independence and musicians were induced into Party membership under the threat of losing their livelihood. The state, which had long played a prominent role as a patron of music, now began to assume a ubiquitous presence.

One effect of the regime's bureaucratic intrusions upon musical life was to increase the quantity of music being performed. Through the proliferation of government-sponsored festivals, competitions, stipends, commissions, music conservatories, and symphony orchestras (some of them uniformed), the state satisfied the demand from some German musicians for both bread and art. According to Prieberg, in June of 1933 from 43 to 46 percent of those professionally engaged in music were unemployed, as compared with a general unemployment figure of 28.9 percent; by 1936, however, the number of unemployed musicians had decreased from 23,889 to 14,547. And better times were still to come for the employment prospects of German musicians, with the war and its demands on the male population.

It might be assumed that only a monolithic administration could have been responsible for the musical plentitude which Hitler's regime supported in the Thirties. Indeed, in the context of Hitler's racial, aesthetic, and national stands, one would expect the regime to have laid thorough cultural siege to Jews, modernists, and non-German music and musicians, all of which the Nazis claimed had unfairly profited during the Weimar years.

In reality, the Nazis were far from being so consistent. To judge from Prieberg's account, the official Nazi music administration was without a coherent policy; in its place were the random workings of a bureaucracy in which personal whim and considerations of political advantage held sway.

For example, Prieberg shows that Goering protected selected Jewish musicians, among them the renowned Berlin opera conductor Leo Blech. Anton Webern, frequently attacked as a cultural bolshevist and a decadent, received a small subsidy from the government because, in the words of a functionary, "even if [Webern] was a Social Democrat before the revolution . . . he is . . . politically now not suspect." (Webern's son-in-law was a Nazi storm trooper.) Stravinsky's works were tolerated until February of 1940, when he was finally blacklisted—not because he was modern, or even because he was Slavic, but because he was discovered to be a French and not a Soviet citizen. The most frequently performed opera in Germany during the Nazi era was, by popular demand, Puccini's *Tosca*; by comparison, the operas of Hitler's adored Wagner fared rather badly.

Prieberg's account of composer Paul Hindemith's problems with the regime provides some deeper insight into the character of the Nazi music administration. For several years, the regime's official attitude toward Hindemith was cautious. Though as a modernist Hindemith had his enemies within the Nazi Party, his world stature made him a political asset. As early as November 1933, Hindemith had participated, as a member of the executive council of the Guild of German Composers, in the

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work of the *Reichsmusikkammer.* But his official position did not ensure his invulnerability to persecution. This was immediately apparent in the fall of 1934, when the projected Berlin premiere of his opera, *Mathis der Maler,* was canceled on orders from none other than the *Führer* himself. The conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler attempted to reverse this decision, first by publishing an open letter in defense of Hindemith's music in the November 25 edition of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and then by resigning the next week his posts as musical director of the *Staatsoper* and Berlin Philharmonic and his position as Vice-President of the *Reichsmusikkammer.* But Furtwängler's sacrifices came to nothing. Hitler, who had been offended by the bubble-bath scene in a 1929 Berlin production of Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage,* harbored a deep-seated aversion to the composer. And Goebbels, who until then had been an outspoken supporter of Hindemith in Party circles, perceived that the affair might affect the prestige of his cultural empire: the public was taking Furtwängler's side and the majority of the Party, Hitler's. Scrambling to assert the power of the state over cultural matters and to secure the good will of the *Führer,* Goebbels delivered a speech on December 6 in which he deprecated Hindemith's work with specific reference to the "obscene" and "kitsch" scene in *Neues vom Tage* that had so troubled Hitler.

It is not clear from Prieberg's discussion when or why the regime at last categorically prohibited the performance of Hindemith. Probably the final decision was made following Hindemith's emigration in 1938. One thing is certain: by 1943 his music was unperformable. That year, the director of the Linz *Bruckner Konservatorium* lost his job for programming Hindemith works in a June concert, and was even threatened with being sent to a concentration camp for his crimes.

That the regime's musical decisions could not be attributed to ideological consistency was a fact not lost on many enthusiastic Party members within the musical community. Some of the most interesting revelations of Prieberg's work concern the unwelcome pressures that these zealots exerted upon a government that seemed much more tolerant than their standards of ideological purity would allow.

Take, for example, the *Entjudung* of cultural life. There were those who would not be satisfied with the mere removal of Jews and their compositions from the concert hall. Inspired by the Party's leading ideologist and cultural expert, Alfred Rosenberg, these enthusiasts produced and commissioned new texts for those Handel oratorios written on Old Testament themes. One favorite, bearing the suspect name "Judas Maccabeus," was often reworked, reappearing in several guises, among them, *Battle and Victory Song of the Fatherland, Hero-Folk,* and *Freedom Oratorio.* There were even efforts to re-set those Mozart operas whose texts had been written by the Jewish-born Lorenzo da Ponte. Despite protests from Goebbels, such scrupulosity could not easily be stopped. Finally, in 1940, the state brought these deviations under control through the establishment of yet another special government office.

In the battle against modernism, it was again not the state but rather enthusiastic Party members who took the initiative. Their argument was, of course, that modern music was a product of "Jewish influence." An officially sanctioned performance of Alban Berg's *Lulu-Symphonie,* conducted in November of 1934 by Erich Kleiber, the General Music Director of the Berlin State Opera, provoked severe reactions from the press. Prieberg quotes a fanatic music critic:

> An ungratifying, in part abominably atonal music, with saxophone and vibraphone, with "movie music" and other outdated forms. An enraged member of the audience shouted, "Heil, Mozart!" Opposition was stifled by the hooting and clapping of the Kleiber-clique, in which the Jewish element is conspicuous.

Perhaps the strongest anti-modern force in the Nazi era was Rosenberg's *NS Kultur-*

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Gemeinde (National Socialist Cultural Association), the most significant of the Party's apparati. Its musical activities included not only the staging of concerts and opera, the building of musical ensembles, and the arranging of boycotts, but the issuing of commissions, the printing of scores, and the making of records.

In 1935, the Danish twelve-tone composer Paul von Klenau, disappointed with the way the audience received his work, wrote to Friedrich W. Herzog, editor of the influential NSKG journal, *Die Musik,* protesting the critic's statement that Klenau's opera *Michael Kohlhaas* was a "rancid swamp":

> I start from the assumption that you knew I was once married to a Jewess. However, I have been separated from her for nine years now, and correspond neither with her nor with her family. Please do not compel me to speak of this bitter episode. You know my position on the racial question.

Klenau was actually in no danger of being blacklisted by the *Reichsmusikkammer,* where Goebbels, the arch-enemy of Rosenberg, tended to accommodate some of the demands upon the government that came from avant-gardists in the *Hitler-Jugend.* In fact, Klenau's work was generally praised by the press, and he enjoyed no less than three opera premieres between 1933 and 1939. Still, support from the NSKG unforthcoming, he played it safe. He took to claiming that his compositional style was not really twelve-tone at all but rather a "totalitarian system" of twelve tones inspired by "Tristan harmony."

That the Nazi regime resisted Party pressures and allowed a certain amount of modern music to penetrate concert life was not simply a result of political machinations. It was also an indication of the poverty of Nazi ideology, which, as Prieberg shows, proved unable to provide an aesthetic theory to justify the regime's music policies.

In fact, Nazi ideology was actually a powerful obstacle to any fruitful thought on the subject of aesthetics. The obsession with race, for instance, led many loyal musicologists to attempt a definition of the racial foundation of the German musical classics. In this way they thought to stigmatize the supposedly Jewish characteristics of Mendelssohn's music and, further, to establish a basis for the aesthetic of the "New Order." The intellectual dead-ends reached here were discouraging. Even more discouraging must have been the knotty problems that emerged in discussions about the future of "National Socialist" music. One thinker solved these problems with this declaration:

> . . . young composers should not forget that in the struggle for a national revolution in music one must take for a model . . . political National Socialism, which precisely because it is national, is also socialist. This means that as revolutionary musicians they can create new music, as national musicians only German music, but as socialist musicians they must make a beginning—a music which every capable and willing German ear, though it be unschooled and uncultivated, can pick up.

This statement captures the essence of the regime's dilemma in the active sponsoring of new music. It is not surprising that the government's main goal in this area was to reach the masses through kitsch, a superficial music based on familiar styles. But such admissions of ideological impotency—and there were many—also explain the increasingly confused politicization of culture that marked the regime's wartime initiatives.

Laboring still under the conviction that music must reflect the state, Nazi music administrators paid heed to the war cries of Hitler's army, blacklisting music, both contemporary and past, that was written by nationals of enemy or conquered nations. By 1942, this rash of blacklisting had excised from the repertory most French, Russian, English, and American music. And even where the blacklisting had not yet occurred, the Nazis had no qualms about demonstrating their fears that enemy-alien music was subversive: a Czech music critic was stomped to death by Gestapo officials for

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praising Smetana's *Má Vlast* (My Fatherland) following a Prague performance near the end of the war. Indeed, so much music was removed in one way or another from circulation that it might be surmised that had Italy not been a Nazi ally, German opera houses would have had to close even before the massive Allied bombing raids.

Some attempts were made, of course, to save a few of music's greatest names from blacklisting. There was a great deal of tedious genealogical research done to prove Chopin's and César Franck's Aryan ancestry. And the regime took a much more liberal stand toward the repertoire in occupied France, where encouraging collaboration was the order of the day. But all such initiatives did was to underscore the vulgarity of the regime's attitude to cultural affairs.

Indeed, Goebbels himself did not shrink from candidly displaying his own inability to appreciate serious music. Though the Minister of Propaganda addressed the opening of the *Reichskulturkammer,* in 1933, by saying "we have in mind an ideal: the marriage of a heroic conception of life with the eternal laws of art," he made sure that Germany's soldiers and civilians were sent to their deaths with an increasing amount of military marches and *Unterhaltungsmusik* (entertainment music). In June of 1941, Goebbels publicly answered criticism by defenders of serious music of the state's lowbrow radio programming:

> We do not want to gain the reputation of seeking to impair the high standing of Germany's musical culture. We also know the value of a serious concert, or even of a great opera. That we must dispense with these things because in wartime we lack the time, the rest and the inclination, is for us, too, a renunciation. After the war, both serious music and entertainment music will, in sufficient measure, have their chance on German radio.

This statement was made to a nation that had produced Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms, whose intellectuals had long hailed music as the most spiritually ennobling of all the arts and as a reflection of the loftiest of human aspirations.

Despite the utter corruption of German musical culture, many of the lights of German musical life willingly joined Goebbels's propaganda circus. Some, like Herbert von Karajan and Karl Böhm, seemed to have been converted to National Socialism. Prieberg tells us that Karajan registered himself as a Party member twice in 1933, once in Austria (while it was still a republic) and once more, a month later, in Württemberg. Böhm enthusiastically assumed the role of *Musikpolitiker* in March of 1938, when he praised the arrival of Hitler's troops into Austria with the following fanfare:

> National Socialism has placed before the musician a goal and a task for which it is worthwhile to pledge all his abilities and productive strength: to serve the German *Volk* and its highest cultural property. But for that [service] the new state repays the artist in that it incorporates him in the mighty work of reconstructing Germany, and elevates him to equal partnership in the totality of all its [creative] enterprise.

Böhm's call to action in respect to the Anschluss plebiscite of April 10, 1938 was even less high-minded:

> Whosoever does not ratify the *Führer*'s action with a 100 percent "yes" does not deserve to bear the honorable title of "German."

Carl Orff went so far in cooperation with the Nazis as to compose a substitute—so longed for by the Nazis—for Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* music. The commissions had been rejected by both Hans Pfitzner and Werner Egk (two otherwise loyal Party members) in deference to the greatness of Mendelssohn's work. Orff, however, did the deed with earnestness and industriousness: "Most honorable Herr State Council," he wrote, on June 10 to Doctor Fritz Krebs, District Leader of the Nazi Party in Frankfurt, and a member of the *Reichskammer* presidium:

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> Today I received, with great joy, the commission . . . and I thank you profusely for this further indication of your faith in me . . . . Devotedly yours, Heil Hitler!

And in early October of 1939, when the rehearsals for the premiere of this new work were in progress, Orff addressed his Maecenas once again in writing:

> I hope that I have been lucky enough to have composed this music as you have imagined it should sound . . . .

No such self-effacement characterized the behavior of Richard Strauss, who was only too happy to become the first president of the *Reichsmusikkammer*. It seems that Strauss felt his collaboration was the *sine qua non* of the high quality of German musical life. In a letter to his Jewish librettist, Stefan Zweig, of June 17, 1935, Strauss explained his position vis-à-vis the Nazis:

> Who told you that I have compromised myself politically? Because I have conducted a concert in place of that greasy louse-rag,[2] Bruno Walter? That I did for love of the orchestra. Because I substituted for another "non-Aryan," Toscanini? That I did for love of Bayreuth. These things have nothing to do with politics. What the greasy press says is nothing to me, and neither should you bother yourself about it. That I act the part of the *Reichsmusikkammer* president? In order to do some good, and to prevent greater misfortune . . . simply out of the consciousness of artistic duty! I would have accepted this vexsome office under any regime. But neither Kaiser Wilhelm nor Mr. Rathenau offered it to me.

A few weeks later, Strauss was to find himself the victim of his own naïveté. Owing to the interception of this letter by the Gestapo and the scandal that attended the late June premiere of *Die Schweigsame Frau*—Strauss threatened to absent himself should the name of Zweig as librettist be withheld from the program—the composer was forced to resign his presidency of the *Reichsmusikkammer*. Further, *Die Schweigsame Frau* was encouraged to disappear from the repertoire.

At first these punishments demoralized Strauss, who wrote to Hitler asking to explain himself in a private audience. (The letter went unanswered.) But it soon became clear that the Nazis were as convinced as was Strauss himself of his pre-eminent position in German musical life. The disagreements were painted over. Strauss continued to receive large royalties from the performance of *Rosenkavalier, Ariadne auf Naxos, Arabella, Feuersnot,* and *Intermezzo*. He retained the presidency of the Permanent Commission for the International Cooperation of Composers, the official replacement (organized, naturally, along the lines of the *Führer-Prinzip*) for the defunct German Section of the International Society for Contemporary Music. And he was able to secure protection for his daughter-in-law, a Jewess.

All of this came as reward for behavior that was at least in part contemptuous. True, Strauss was not above accepting the state's commission for an "Olympic Hymn," in 1936, or above setting to music the nationalist texts of Weinheber. (His attitude in these matters was that "idleness is the root of all evil.") But he also took advantage of every opportunity he had to irritate his official admirers.

In 1943, for example, Strauss refused to place his nineteen-room villa in Garmisch at the disposal of evacuees and victims of Allied bombing. No soldier need fight on his behalf, he said at the time—the war was no concern of his. Hitler was so angered by this recalcitrance that he sent out orders forbidding Party officials any further contact with Strauss and ordered the press to refrain from paying the composer any attention. It was not long before Hitler was brought to heel, however. On his eightieth birthday,

2 It is interesting that the phrase "greasy louse-rag" (*schmierigen Lauselumpen*) does not appear in the English language edition of the correspondence between Strauss and Zweig.

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Strauss received a note of congratulations from the *Führer*. In a letter to Hitler, Furtwängler had warned him of the international repercussions that would attend the neglect of so august a musician.

On that same occasion, in 1944, two SS officers arrived in Garmisch bearing champagne and best wishes from Hans Frank, Governor-General of occupied Poland, and an avid patron of music in his eastern realm. Upon taking their leave, the officers were asked by Strauss to do him the favor of conveying to Herr Frank the names of certain of Strauss's friends whom he would like released from "these dumb KZs [concentration camps]."

Admittedly, it took some nerve to make such a request. But the flippant way in which it was made and the slowness with which Strauss finally reacted to Nazi criminality epitomize his tendency to belittle the great moral and political issues of the day as unworthy of the artist's concern.

At issue here was the conviction that artistic matters must take precedence over moral and political issues. This was a conviction that even Furtwängler—for all the courage he displayed in several challenges to the regime's cultural policies—shared. It certainly informed the tone of his open letter to Goebbels of April, 1933, in which he appealed the dismissal of Otto von Klemperer and Bruno Walter from their musical posts:

> If the struggle against Jewry is directed, in the main, against those artists who—themselves rootless and destructive—seek effect through *Kitsch* and dry virtuosity, that is only in order. The struggle against them and the personification of that spirit, which, by the way, possesses some Germans also, cannot be led emphatically or consistently enough. If this struggle, however, is also directed against true artists, it is not in the interest of cultural life.

The futile retreat from moral and political responsibility evident in this defense of Jewish artists is but one justification for Prieberg's lament, at the end of his work, that:

> music and musicians let themselves be misused again and again. For the historian, the establishment of this fact is as boring as it is bereft of consolation, for it contains the answer to the question: Do musicians learn anything besides music?

It is certainly easy enough to sympathize with such a sigh of *Weltschmerz*; musicians, alas—like everyone else—often behave badly. But is this statement a conclusive judgment upon Germany's musicians—citizens of a nation whose political tradition rendered to the state a pernicious moral authority? And within the scope of a book entitled *Musik im NS-Staat* is Prieberg's conclusion appropriate?

Prieberg runs the risk of shifting the responsibility for Naziism's cultural offenses from the totalitarian state to Germany's musicians, many of whom had no choice but to conform and obey the dictates of Germany's leadership. In his effort to make the case of complicity and to confront the German nation with its unpleasant past, Prieberg has leveled a rash accusation.

And he pays for it, for there are some disappointments in this work. Prieberg's concern with the problem of collaboration prompts him to concentrate so fully on personality and incident in relating Nazi Germany's music history that we miss an organized discussion of the creation and proliferation of the state music bureaucracy. (This information is scattered throughout the book.) Further, Prieberg's style—often so chatty that it approaches the gossipy—betrays a particularly mean spirit when he speaks of Germany's great artists. He refuses to acknowledge that even for famous musicians, like Furtwängler, who had the choice of emigration, love of homeland and family may have been the regime's allies in enforcing obedience.

In this connection, one would have welcomed from Prieberg—given his past work on the Soviet Union—some comparison of the situation of musical life in the two great totalitarian dictatorships of our time. Soviet musicians, it might be said, have collabo-

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rated on a grand scale, first with Lenin, then with Stalin, and more recently with less brutal although still totalitarian rulers. Is such collaboration to be despised? How are we to judge these men?

Perhaps all we can do, when faced with this terrible dilemma of individual responsibility, is to comment that totalitarianism's abuse of culture is only an extension of its vicious attack on the individual. Prieberg's book is one more melancholy reminder that the enemy is not simply human weakness. That, after all, is always with us. In our time the enemy is the all-powerful state, and its use to enforce policies and interests that cannot survive the healthy give-and-take of a democratic society.

Mann revealed

Thomas Mann Thomas Mann Diaries: 1918-1939. Selection and Foreword by Hermann Kesten. Translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston. Harry N. Abrams, 471 pages, $29.95

reviewed by Arthur A. Cohen

Among the many entries in the remarkable *Tagebücher* of Robert Musil that deal with Thomas Mann is one whose cryptic simplicity summarizes the principal themes to which discussion of Thomas Mann is increasingly devoted. Musil writes in Notebook 28 of 1928: "Thomas Mann, the bourgeois, the voice of the nation."

Musil, it must be recalled, had many times approached Mann for assistance in the dissemination of his own work; for the most part, he was denied help. Only late in his life did Mann join with other German exile writers to appeal to an English publisher on Musil's behalf to undertake publication of *The Man Without Qualities,* surely one of the masterpieces of modern European literature. Musil, on the occasion of this act of support, remarks in the same journals that now he felt guilty about all the unkind notes he had written about Mann. He did not, however, undertake to strike them from his notebooks. Clearly, long before his death in 1941 Musil had given up the idea of fame and had foregone the notion that his journals would ever be published and his private world scrutinized. No need then to amend and rectify. And if this can be said about Robert Musil, how much more so of the *Diaries* of Franz Kafka, who regarded his writings as so deeply private that he wished them to the same fires to which he had commanded Max Brod to consign the rest of his work.

It stands then: "Thomas Mann, the bourgeois, the voice of the nation." And this observation is particularly apt to the assessment of *Thomas Mann Diaries: 1918-1939,* superbly translated by Richard and Clara Winston and less superbly edited by Hermann Kesten (whose annotation is meager).

Mann had none of Kafka's scruples about publicity nor did he have Musil's lack of confidence in posterity. Although he briefly flirted with indecision about their fate, thinking in a note of August 25, 1950, that he would destroy *all* the diaries before his death, Mann temporized: "Or is it that I desire that the world know all about me?" Peter de Mendelssohn, the German editor of Mann's *Diaries,* states that Mann "wanted the world to know him, as well and as accurately as possible . . . therefore he designated that the parcels be opened and his entries read after the designated interval . . . and thus the demand was made that they become available to the general public. He did not shrink from self-revelation and self-exposure." Although Mendelssohn's assertion seems open and shut, it is not quite so.

Thomas Mann began to keep diaries from his earliest school days in Lübeck until shortly before his death in Zurich in 1955. There survive, however, only the notebooks that were kept from 1918 through 1921 and from 1933 until his death. What became of those earliest diaries and the notebooks from the middle years? Writing in 1895 to Otto Grautoff, an intimate of Mann's from their Lübeck youth, Mann cheerily announces that he is burning his own diaries

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and advises Grautoff to do likewise—to destroy the "mass of secret—*very* secret—writings lying around." On April 30, 1933, several months after he and his wife, heeding the advice of family and friends, had determined not to return to Munich following the completion of a European reading tour, Mann wrote that he "woke up seized with panic about the suitcase containing the diaries . . . . My fears now revolve first and foremost almost exclusively around this threat to my life's secrets. They are deeply serious. The consequences could be terrible, even fatal."

What did the consummate bourgeois and literary voice of the German nation have to fear? The internal evidence suggests one answer. The earlier diaries had encompassed the period when Mann was working beyond his first misogynistic story, "The Fallen," toward a more composed and finally serene integration of women into his private world. If women were a problem—as one suspects they were—his homosexual fantasy and enactment were surely their counterfoil. Mann observes in the present *Diaries,* when referring to the analogies between himself and Goethe, that Goethe appears to have maintained an active sexual life well into his seventies, but "always with girls," whereas in his case "the inhibitions are probably stronger and so one wearies sooner, apart from differences in vitality." Mann had much earlier described his total loss of sexual interest in his wife and his subsequent refusal to share her bed; he had frequently, but uncompulsively, noted the appearance of this or that handsome youth whose features he had transcribed and to whom he had invariably drawn some classical allusion—this one a Hermes or that one god-like; but by the time of these later entries he had already wearied of active sex, homosexual as well as heterosexual. Even when the last great passion of his life, young Klaus Heuser, turns up in Zurich in 1935 and visits him, Mann writes: "Unchanged or little changed: slim, still boyish at twenty-four, the eyes the same. Kept looking into his face and saying 'My God'. . . He expected me to kiss him, but I

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did not do so; I did manage to say something loving to him before he left, however."

Klaus Heuser had come into Mann's life in 1927 as a boy of seventeen. They had exchanged several long visits and undoubtedly many letters (which were not available in the American edition of *The Letters of Thomas Mann 1889-1955*). And if we know specifically of Klaus Heuser and the earlier and even more passionate friendship with Paul Ehrenberg, which began in 1900 when Mann was twenty-five, it may be supposed that there are many diary entries from those years, up to 1918, that describe the complexity of his sexual feeling, and, during the years 1922 to 1932 (when marriage had already acquired routine, children were abundant, and his homoerotic feelings were renewed), culminate in his intense and pedagogic romance with the young Heuser.

Clearly, Mann would not have wished the world to learn the extent and quality of his homoerotic enthusiasms. The world might be permitted to guess, but its suspicions need not be confirmed. Even more so in the case of the diaries left behind in the Manns' Munich house after they went into voluntary exile in Switzerland in 1933. Had the Nazis discovered those diaries, it can be imagined to what uses they would have been turned. Mann surely had reason for panic. And yet Mann did not scruple to destroy them until 1945, when he was already settled in Pacific Palisades. He allowed them to remain in the various places to which he traveled and in which he lived during those early exile years, prey to the robbery and political mischief to which other exiles were subjected by Nazi agents. Prudence gained a victory only near the end.

It may be surmised that the diaries which were destroyed contained reflections and annotations that in Mann's eyes compromised his standing in the world's regard. It is not that he considered his erotic bent to be unworthy or frivolous. Nothing Mann did was regarded by him as contemptible. It was all of critical importance in the formation of his genius. If it fed his work, it was a significant nutriment; and since he regarded

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all of his writing as essentially autobiographical, he would scarcely have considered his homosexual infatuations to have been unimportant. It is only that by 1933, by which time he had judged his life to be a public monument, one of the great gifts of the German nation to the world, Mann had decided that only as much as the world could bear would be revealed.

Essentially, then, the *Diaries* are another document prepared by Mann for the scrutiny of his curious public. Unlike Musil and Kafka, Mann prepared them with full awareness of the world over his shoulder. The literary work always came first. At the center of Mann's days were the obligatory pages that he produced each morning before lunch. The *Diaries* tell us on which book he was working, but precious little about the process of their unfolding and development. Beyond the day's pages came letters, the nearly twenty thousand handwritten letters which Erika Mann estimated her father wrote during his lifetime, supplemented by many thousands of others that he dictated when the volume of mail rose in his later years and his energy declined. The letters, published in three volumes in Germany, alongside complete collections of his letters to Hermann Hesse, Karl Kerényi, Erich Kahler, Ernst Bertram, and his publisher Samuel Fischer, are astonishingly revealing. They are invariably guarded and circumspect, protecting his insistence upon personal invulnerability, while occasionally revealing unexpected joy and deep-seated pain and neurotic anxiety. Letters were Mann's forays into intimacy—intimacy rarely brought to friendship, insulated as he insisted upon being from human parity and confrontation. The *Diaries*—unlike the letters—are unfortunately all formal structure, the frangible eggshell of his days, revealing principally his physical condition, his meetings, his letters, his diet and walks, only occasionally allowing a ray of light to illuminate his human confusions and uncertainties. For the most part, then, the diaries are boring, their boredom devolving from an unrelieved narcissistic tedium, infrequently relieved by the eruption of authentic personal, moral, or political self-disclosure. Mann indited himself as a monument, chipping the image to ensure the subtle contrasts of light and shadow, high moment and relief, thinking all the while that he had brought off an even and uninflected voice which prevented his human nakedness from being viewed. In part he succeeded. The reader only casually familiar with Mann's literary *oeuvre* will be successfully deceived; however, if one already knows the literary works, the volumes of letters, and such biographical works as Nigel Hamilton's *The Brothers Mann,* the reading of the *Diaries* becomes a fascinating introduction to the unprotected Thomas Mann.

I wish to deal with only two specific examples of the significance of the *Diaries*: Thomas Mann's ambivalent attitude toward the Jews and his confusing rendition of National Socialism and Communism.

The received opinion is that Thomas Mann was essentially a philo-Semite. He was, after all, married to Katia Pringsheim, the daughter of a wealthy assimilated Jewish academic. Moreover, by the time his fame had reached America, Mann was an outspoken and passionate opponent of the Nazis, a member of numerous committees to assist refugees (most of whom were Jewish), and a fervent enemy of Nazi racial doctrine. All this is true, but by no means sufficient.

Replying to his brother Heinrich's internationalism and Francophilia, Mann published in 1918 *The Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* (to be published this spring in English translation), in which he documented his patrician affections for conservative Germany and his conviction that Germany deserved its proper place in the sun as the principal protector of traditional values of work, dignity, justice. Mann was persuaded that the Jews—whatever their gifts—were a divisive factor in the German social fabric. Mann could continue to enjoy his Jewish friends and admirers, but he did not exempt the Jews from his snobbish nasti-

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ness. The early diaries which cover the three years from the surrender of Germany in World War I through the Munich Communist uprising of 1919 and the political unrest of 1921-1922 never concentrate upon the Jews as such. References to them are casual details in an otherwise intense preoccupation with the need for restored order even at the price of a military dictatorship. The Jews are there however—"Jewish scribblers," "Jewish usury," Jewish war profiteers suspected, Jewish leadership of the Red revolt condemned. All of the familiar and characteristic remarks of a German bourgeois annoyed with the Jews for constituting an incorrigible and noxious solvent in the already messy chemistry of the postwar German nation.

There is reference to, but as with everything interesting in the *Diaries,* too little elaboration of, the critical essay on the Jews that he wrote in the form of an open letter on the "Jewish Question" for a special issue of the *Merkur* in September, 1921. Mann notes that he read the essay aloud to a convocation of family and friends and that only his Jewish wife strenuously objected. The essay was modified and delivered but never published. It happens, however, that the essay was set up in type and a very few copies circulated among the editorial staff of the periodical. One of these copies was given to me by Alfred Vagts, the German expressionist poet and historian, who was then working on the *Merkur.* It is an astonishing document—olympian, contemptuous, full of half-baked political and social snobbisms, that amount to little more than the blusterings of a conservative writer who knew far less than he should have known—as the voice of the nation—about the history of the Jews in Germany.

All this was to pass when Mann went into exile in 1933, it would be thought, but it is not the case. On April 10, 1933 Mann notes: "But for all that, might not something deeply significant and revolutionary be taking place in Germany? The Jews . . . It is no calamity after all that Alfred Kerr's brazen and poisonous Jewish-style imitation of Nietzsche is now suppressed or that the domination of the legal system by Jews has been ended . . . . I am beginning to suspect that in spite of everything this process is one of those that have two sides to them." And again on April 20, 1933, he writes: "I could have a certain amount of understanding for the rebellion against the Jewish element."

To be sure, these entries are offset by frequent remarks about the ugly mistreatment of the Jews, their humiliation and harassment, all of which are regarded by Mann as vile and stupid. But during those early years of exile Mann had not yet reached the point of turning his back on Germany and giving up hope of retrieving his considerable blocked property and wealth; moreover, he was still hoping that he would continue to be published in Germany, believing that his books would carry implicit ideological weight against the regime. He reached the crossroads in January, 1936, when he replied to an attack on the German exile writers by Eduard Korrodi that appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung.* In that widely disseminated rebuttal Mann made clear that the internationalism of the German novel which Korrodi had insisted was wrought by the Jewish component in German letters did not arise from Jews alone, but that he and his brother Heinrich were as much responsible as the Jews. "The 'international' qualities of Jews are nothing more nor less than their Mediterranean-European qualities . . . the Germans', or the German rulers', hatred of the Jews is in a higher sense not directed toward the Jews at all, or not toward them alone: it is directed against European and all loftier Germanism; it is directed, as becomes increasingly apparent, against the Christian and classical foundations of Western morality."

The reply of Mann to Korrodi's attack, although it led directly to his expatriation by the Nazis in December of 1936, was in retrospect pathetically weak and tergiversating. Mann's ambivalence about the Jews never altered. His delight in their ancient origins which radiates throughout the Joseph novels results as much from the fact that he

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invented, from dubious sources, the history of the ancient Jews as that he perceived their actual history and had learned to understand and resolve his bourgeois prejudices.

Mann's understanding of the Jewish question—always a "question" for those who find Jews hard to take—is put in relief by his even more confusing politics. From the citations we have offered regarding the Jews, it is clear that during the earliest phases of the Nazi rule of Germany, Mann's mind was not made up. At the same time that there are countless diary entries that revile the barbarism of the National Socialists, their stupid cultural revisionism, their transparent rhetoric and deceit, Mann was initially appalled by their consummate vulgarity. National Socialism was the revanchist rabble, the other side of democracy which he had opposed in his *Reflections* of 1918. Nazi populism was a travesty of German culture—it was all too disgusting.

At the same time he regarded the Soviet Union and its Communist ideology as cultural "hotentot-ism," which, however, would be quickly transformed if it ever assumed power in Germany. Communism was thought a viable possibility in the immediate period after World War I precisely because the capitalism of the victors was, in Mann's view, morally bankrupt. But he vacillated and waffled endlessly, one day applauding the workers' councils in Munich while on the next finding their cant unbearable. And even toward the end of the diaries we have before us, Mann has the insouciance to address a letter to Mikhail Jefimovich Koltzov, a Russian journalist on *Pravda,* on behalf of the widow of the Communist Erich Mühsam (murdered by the Nazis), who had taken refuge in the Soviet Union and had been arrested. Although Mann briefly refers to the matter in his entry for August 1, 1936, it is the letter which reveals Mann's naïveté:

> Upon hearing this news [of her arrest] I once again looked through the draft of the new Soviet Constitution. Article 127 states: "The citizens of the USSR are assured personal inviolability. No one may be arrested without the approval of the state prosecutor." If Frau Mühsam has really been thrown into prison, was this done on the basis of a court-order and with the approval of the state prosecutor? Article 129 says: "The USSR grants the right of asylum to foreign citizens who have been persecuted for advocating the interests of the working class, or for scientific activity, or for engaging in the struggle for national liberation." What bitterness for all of us who would like to regard the new Russian Constitution as the instrument of an authoritarian democracy, if this asylum should actually take the form of a prison cell.

At the same time that one notes this political confusion—of which we have cited only a few examples—we are also compelled to recognize that the sub-text of Mann's politics was and remained throughout his early maturity his profound ambivalence towards his older brother Heinrich. It is Heinrich Mann—who supported the Munich revolt of 1919—who is loathed. Heinrich Mann's public self and literary persona—oratorical, pacifist, enthusiast of radical causes, always critical of German bourgeois institutions—turned the knife in Mann's throat. It was only much later, when both were in exile, but Thomas Mann had achieved permanent ascendancy, that Mann begins to form his politics without reference to the orienting guidance supplied to it by his opposition to his brother. They had reconciled in exile, but Mann was never politically clear again. He was lucid and coherent when he was defending German bourgeois values—the values he explored and focused on in his novels—but when the fabric of German society shredded there were too few guy lines to steady and reinforce his ideological direction. It was then, during those later years, that Thomas Mann became fuzzy and imprecise, yielding up judgment to sentiment and goodwill. His cherished German bourgeoisie had gone mad and Mann no longer knew precisely how to speak as the voice of the German nation. Fortunately, he

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still knew how to write and *Doctor Faustus,* his superlative novel of the German demonic and apotheosis, could emerge from the shamble of his public confusions.

Photographs and history

Beaumont Newhall The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present. Museum of Modern Art, 320 pages, $40

reviewed by Gail Buckland

All of us concerned with photography are indebted to Beaumont Newhall. Directly or indirectly, the author of *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present*—originally published in 1937 as a Museum of Modern Art exhibition catalogue titled *Photography 1839-1937*—has been our teacher. The fifth edition, awaited as a potential clearinghouse for the substantial research carried out in the field during the past decade, has recently been published. For nearly fifty years, writers and curators have either expanded on the subjects he originally researched or filled in the gaps. As John Szarkowski in the acknowledgments to his book *The Photographer's Eye* stated: "Finally, any attempt to consider photography critically must acknowledge its basic debt to the fundamental work of Beaumont Newhall, whose scholarship and judgment are so fine that they serve equally well critical approaches very different from his own." Newhall has earned his position as America's most eminent photographic historian; he was there at the beginning—or was the beginning—of the field.

Mr. Newhall was trained as an art historian at Harvard, the Courtauld Institute in London, and the Institut d'Art et d'Archéologie, Paris. He founded the library of the Museum of Modern Art and was its Curator of Photography from 1940 to 1942 and again from 1945 to 1946. For twenty-three years he was associated with the George Eastman House (now the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House), originally laying out their first exhibits and for thirteen years acting as its director. The George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, the world's first museum devoted exclusively to photography in all its applications, soon became this country's finest photographic archive and library. Working with such Kodak scientists as C. E. Kenneth Mees and Walter Clark, Mr. Newhall learned chemistry and optics and became adept at communicating these subjects to a lay audience. In *The History of Photography* he is lucid on the technical development of the medium.

But Mr. Newhall is an authority on many other aspects of photography as well. Over the years he has published hundreds of articles and over twenty books and catalogues, including *The Daguerreotype in America* (1961), *Frederick H. Evans* (1964), *Latent Image: the Discovery of Photography* (1967), and *Airborne Camera: the World from the Air and Outer Space* (1969). *On Photography: A Source Book of Photo History* (1956) and his recently published *Photography: Essays and Images* (1980) provide documents vital to any analysis of past events and trends. In one year, 1952, he wrote articles on Brett Weston, tintypes, early astronomical photography, George Eastman's first camera design, the introduction of photography to America, pigeons and microphotography, the focimeter, Mathew Brady, Eadweard Muybridge, Edward Curtis, new color photography, identifying daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, Victor Hugo's photo album, Arctic photographs made in 1869, Delacroix and photography, Roger Fenton's photographic van, and much else. Information that appeared in his "Daguerreotype and the Traveler" in *Magazine of Art* (May 1951) could inspire five doctoral dissertations.

The title page of the new, fifth edition of *The History of Photography* tells the reader that this is a completely revised and enlarged edition, but it is neither substantially revised nor enlarged, although there is new information and the picture selection is fresh.

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Mr. Newhall's discussion of recent trends is inconsequential and the color photographs at the end, which are supposed to represent a new direction in the field, appear to be tokenism, perhaps instigated by the publisher. They should not have been included. The choice of the black-and-white photographs is of the highest order. Yet, one wonders why Mr. Newhall ever extended his survey past the original cut-off date of 1937.

Lisette Model is not mentioned in the text (although one of her pictures from the series *Promenade des Anglais, Nice* is reproduced next to a very contemporary-looking Brassaï), nor is Helen Levitt, whose photographs of New York street life in the 1940s are so powerful and original. But neither does Mr. Newhall consider Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Bruce Davidson, Roy DeCarava, Robert Doisneau, Elliot Erwitt, William Klein, Josef Koudelka, Clarence John Laughlin, Herbert List, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, and Lennart Nilsson. Harry Callahan, active for forty years, receives only a few lines and Cecil Beaton, George Platt Lynes, Philippe Halsman, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, and Arnold Newman appear together in one paragraph in the chapter titled "Photojournalism." (Certainly Penn and Avedon's non-commercial work deserves some recognition.) People who influenced photographers, such as Alexey Brodovitch, are ignored. Even Robert Frank is not discussed until the last three pages of text, where Mr. Newhall very quickly tries to bring the reader up-to-date.

Mr. Newhall is uniquely informed about nineteenth-century photography and writes well on the subject. He includes in his history many of the major figures of this era and certainly enough information to convey the principal developments, both technical and aesthetic. Alfred Stieglitz, coming at the turn of the century, is seminal and marks the shift in Mr. Newhall's history from an involvement with all aspects of photography to a concentration on the fine arts—a shift from image to picture—to use Mr. Newhall's own phrase. After Stieglitz, after the mass proliferation of hand-cameras, viewing photographs is an act of faith—either one believes the photograph is more than a photograph (a heightening of reality, as Edward Weston liked to say, "a kind of super realism that reveals the vital essence of things") or one believes it is the talented witness and communicator of facts, the handmaiden of memory. By dropping from the new edition the astronomical photographs and photomicrographs, the X-ray and reconnaissance air-force photographs that he previously published, and by neglecting fashion, advertising, and industrial photography, Mr. Newhall is admitting that his ostensible subject—the history of photography—is too vast for a one-volume survey and that his commitment is to what he believes to be the greatest artistic achievements with the camera and light-sensitive materials. To judge by this edition, the world of photography has contracted, but in fact it grows larger daily and affects us in a multitude of ways. Mr. Newhall drops the explanation given by Dr. Edwin Land for inventing the Polaroid Land camera in the 1964 edition but retains and emphasizes Minor White's definition of the photograph as metaphor and the camera as a metamorphosing machine, including the statement, "For the photographer to free himself of the tyranny of the visual facts upon which he is utterly dependent, a paradox is the only possible tool."

The 1964 edition had on its cover a circular photograph of George Eastman aboard ship holding a Kodak. In the new edition this simple snapshot has given way to a visually complex, paradoxical 1933 study by Alexander Rodchenko entitled *Chauffeur,* a self-portrait in which Rodchenko also holds a camera. The picture is concerned with reality and illusion, the two constants of the medium since the first photographs were made, and with opposing optically produced distortions with exact delineation of form (the bowl of the chauffeur's pipe isolated on the right). Perhaps, too, the "chauffeur" is a metaphor for the photographer who takes us to the life experiences to which we cannot transport ourselves.

The strange perspective of the Rodchenko

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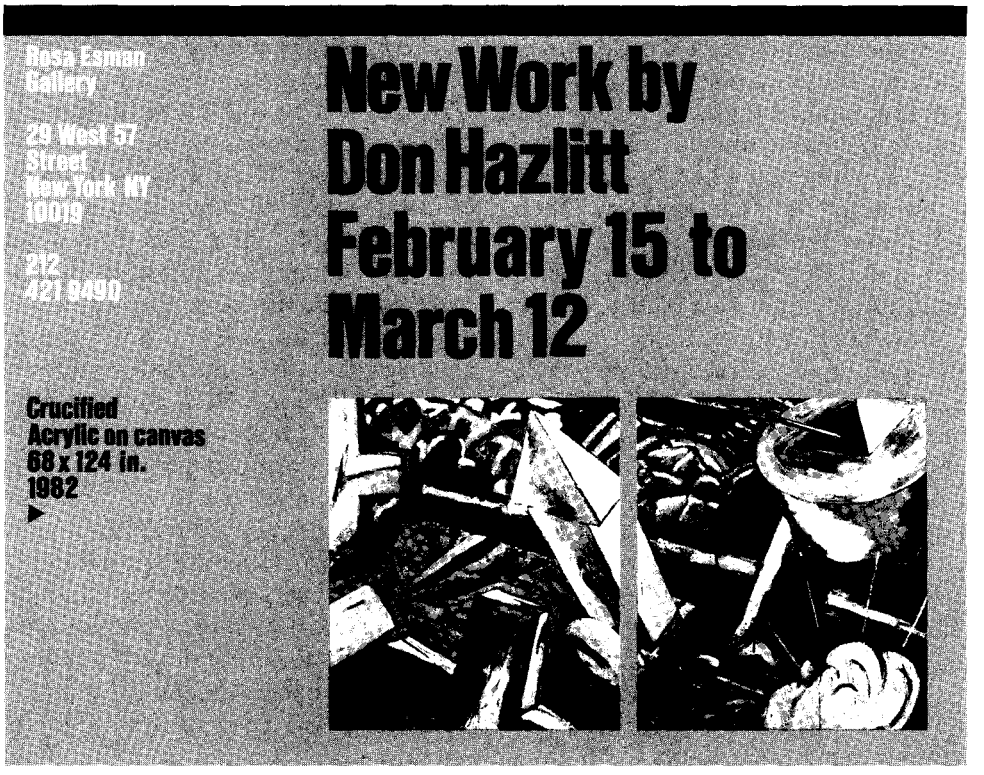
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reflects Mr. Newhall's greater interest in German and Russian photography of the 1920s and 1930s, frequently called avant-garde or "new" photography. He tells us that "George Grosz and John Heartfield traced the origin of their montages to anonymous messages they sent to friends in combat in World War I. They pasted on postcards 'a mischmasch of advertisements for hernia belts, student song-books and dog food, labels from schnapps and wine-bottles, and photographs from picture papers, cut up at will in such a way as to say, in pictures, what would have been banned by the censors if we had said it in words.'" And he clarifies an important point in the history of photojournalism by explaining that the type of image and magazine layout that *Life* magazine has been credited with originating was practiced and perfected in Berlin and Munich in the Twenties. Curiously, although Mr. Newhall includes photomontages by Hannah Hoch, Paul Citroen, El Lissitsky, and John Heartfield, a collage of pasted photographs and pencil by Max Ernst, photoengravings, and gouache and pen and ink by Raoul Hausmann, he says at the end of the book that "today's practitioners of mixed media so intertwine the media the results seem to me to have little to do with photography, and lie outside the scope of this survey."

What should be in or out of such a survey is the difficult question. If, as I imagine, *The History of Photography* is designed to be used as a college text, then my experience as a teacher of the subject leads me to say that students like their history "seasoned." By this I mean that they are intrigued by "old photographs" but that anything touching a contemporary nerve—anything that approaches what they may be doing or feeling—is very sensitive indeed: they do not want superficial treatment of the people who may well be their heroes and models. If Mr. Newhall had kept his study to the round figure of one hundred years, he still would have been able to lay the foundation of the documentary tradition on which he writes eloquently and to share his first-hand experience of the motives of those photographers who went "straight." Then, the criticisms would be only minor and his achievement would seem even greater.

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Fiction chronicle

Less is less

by Joshua Gilder

For some time now the term "minimalist" has been used to describe a group of authors who seem intent on proving the proposition that less is, indeed, less. The label, borrowed from the art world, hasn't really stuck, which is too bad, because this movement—and it is cohesive enough to be thought of as a movement—shares a lot with minimalism in painting and sculpture; it may even be that the language of contemporary art criticism is more applicable to these writers (". . . an almost virtuosic purity in the very absence of technique"; the pile of bricks ". . . set off-center, accentuates the feeling of empty space in the surrounding area") than conventional literary concepts such as character, plot, language, and style.

Anyone who reads *The New Yorker* will be familiar with minimalist fiction: those little stories which seem to grow even smaller as you read. By the end (you know it is the end because you've come to the last page) the story has dwindled down to almost nothing, a mere wisp of melancholic vapor scattered by the first breeze.

These stories are always sad, in a resigned sort of way. If they are written by women, the stories are sad and resentful—of lovers, husbands, children, parents, and friends, all the shadowy figures that pass through their pages. Or they're resentful about work, or the lack of work. Often it's difficult to know what they're resentful about. If the stories are written by men, they are usually sad and angry, with repressed violence bubbling just beneath the surface. Gender does not otherwise make much of a difference. Sex itself is not very important, it is simply something that comes and goes, much like a cold, causing the characters some momentary discomfort. But then, life in these stories is a succession of momentary discomforts.

Several anthologies of recent short fiction have been published over the last year that suggest that minimalism is becoming the dominant trend on the American (and Canadian) scene: John Gardner's *The Best American Short Stories, 1982*;[1] *Matters of Life and Death,* edited by Tobias Wolff;[2] and *Prize Stories 1982, The O. Henry Awards,* edited by William Abraham.[3]

Raymond Carver and Mary Robison, two quintessential minimalists, appear both in the Gardner collection and—together with Ann Beattie, John L'Heureux, and Jayne Anne Phillips—in *Matters of Life and Death,* Tobias Wolff himself, an up-and-coming imitator of Raymond Carver, has won an O. Henry prize, along with Alice Adams and several minor practitioners of the genre. Alice Munro, another important name in this group of writers, doesn't show up in any of the anthologies, but both she and Beattie have recently come out with

1 Houghton, Mifflin, 374 pages, $14.95

2 Wampeter Press, 242 pages, $7.95

3 Doubleday, 321 pages, $15.95

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short-story collections of their own.[4] These authors make up a fairly complete list of the major members of what we might call the *New Yorker* School of Shrinking Fiction. Except for Wolff, they have all established their reputations in *The New Yorker,* and that magazine is in the forefront of advancing their particular literary vision.

Mary Robison's "Pretty Ice" is perhaps the archetypal story of this school. The narrator has been up the whole night before her fiancé, Will, is due to arrive from the East. She's been doing her accounts and getting some pleasure from the tabulations (pleasure is a rare thing in Robison's world; one takes it where one finds it) when her mother comes by to drive her to the station.

> My yard was a frozen pond, and I was careful on the walkway. My mother hit the horn again. Frozen slush came through the toe of one of my chukka boots, and I stopped on the path and frowned at her.

Having established the mood, Robison zeroes in for a thumbnail psychological sketch. The Mother is driving a Mazda:

> I have never owned a car nor learned to drive, but I had a low opinion of my mother's compact. My father and I used to enjoy big cars . . . . My father had been dead for fourteen years, but I resented my mother's buying a car in which he would not have fitted.

They find Will waiting at the station:

> He seemed to have put on weight, girlishly, through the hips, and his face looked thicker to me, from temple to temple. His gold-rimmed spectacles looked too small . . . . I let him kiss me, and then he stepped back and blew a cold breath and drank from the coffee cup, with his eyes on my face.

On the way back, the Mother (who seems to have come out of Alice Adams's story "Greyhound People," in which the narrator is always taking the wrong bus and making her friend wait anxiously at the terminal) gets lost: "It was extremely annoying to me that Mother had gotten us turned around and lost in our own city, and I was angry with Will all of a sudden for wasting seven years on something so superficial." (He's been studying for a doctorate in agronomy.) Outside it is snowing and getting colder and all the trees are covered with ice. After the Mother remarks on the beauty of the storm,

> Will said, "It'll make a bad-looking spring. A lot of shrubs get damaged . . ."
>
> I put my comb away and smiled back at Will. For once I agreed with my mother. Everything was in place, the way it was supposed to be, quiet and holding still.

With the character's emotions frozen in place, the story comes to a stop. This is the usual sort of conclusion to these stories. At the end of L'Heureux's "Departures," a priest, while performing Mass, remembers the nightmare he had the night before of his mother and is unable to continue. He stares blankly at the flame of the altar candle:

> "Sanctify . . ." he says again, staring and staring, still unable to go on or to turn away.
>
> "Sanctify . . ."
>
> The word echoes in the darkness and the light flickers until with his bare hands the priest reaches forward and puts the fire out.

"What difference?" thinks Francis in Alice Munro's "Accident," if she had not married her husband, a dingy little man who taught science at the same high school where she coached choir.

> She doesn't know where the thought comes from or what it means, for of course there is a world of difference, anybody can see that, a life's difference . . . . But inside she's ticking away, all by herself, the same Francis who was there before any of it.

4 *The Moons of Jupiter,* by Alice Munro (Knopf); *The Burning House,* by Ann Beattie (Random House). I dealt with Ann Beattie's fiction in "Down and out: the stories of Ann Beattie" in the October issue of *The New Criterion.*

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Not altogether the same, surely.
The same.

There is certainly nothing wrong with suggesting that some people are unhappy with their husbands, mothers, fiancés or other relations. The dubious thing about these stories is the way they always seem to reach their miniaturized epiphanies just at the point when all the walls have closed in on people's lives, when everything has become completely static. Of course, things like plot and character development have no place here; they imply movement, and the only movement allowed in these stories is a steady constriction of vision, a tighter and tighter hold on reality until finally all life is squeezed out and the pulse stops.

When emotions can't be extinguished or put in deep-freeze, the other solution is to trivialize the people they happen to. Carver specializes in stories depicting the stunted existences of middle-Americans. In "Cathedral," a blind man infuriates his reluctant host by insisting on calling him "Bub," saying things like "You're cooking with Crisco, now, Bub." If the guy weren't blind, the host would probably punch him out. Carver's proles are generally surly and prone to violence. Tobias Wolff's story "Next Door" also belongs to the nasty, brutish, and short sub-genre: A neighbor beats his wife as a prelude to sex, and this upsets the narrator's wife so much that as they lie in bed and he moves his hand up to "the Rockies" she refuses to play "geography."

Robison's fiction is gentler, but her Coach, in the story "Coach," comes very much from the same middle-American milieu (as imagined by the literary avant-garde). Coach is simply a bit dim: "Coach was staring at the thread of water that came from one of the taps. He thought of a lake place where they used to go . . . ." One often finds people in these stories staring blankly at some object or just dully off into space, signifying their blank and dull lives.

Another favorite reductive technique of the *New Yorker* school is to give a character an absurd name, such as Freddy Fox in Ann Beattie's "The Burning House," or the postman, Epluribus Jones, in Ben Brook's "A Postal Creed." Or one can refuse a character any name at all and give him instead a generalized, condescending identification: the "blind-man" in "Cathedral," "Coach" in "Coach," "the priest" in John L'Heureux's "Departures." This sometimes gives rise to prose straight out of a first-grade reader. The most common sentence opening in "Departures" is "The priest is . . ."—as in "The priest is arriving . . . ," "The priest is coming back . . . ," "The priest is sick." Sometimes a more advanced verb is introduced: "The priest waits . . . ," "The priest opens his eyes . . . ." Occasionally we're given an example of past tense: "The priest saw it all."

Tobias Wolff's introduction to *Matters of Life and Death* serves as a kind of *précis* of current literary clichés. The authors he has chosen, Wolff tells us, speak "without flippancy, about things that matter . . . . They write about fear of death, fear of life, the feelings that bring people together and force them apart, the costs of intimacy. They remind us that our house is built on sand. They are, every one of them, interested in what it means to be human." We are, of course, always grateful when an author shows an interest in being human (though it's arguable whether this applies to some of the authors in Wolff's collection). But the telling phrase here is "fear of life." This, finally, is the motivating impulse behind minimalist literature. If life could only be frozen still, or shrunk down to manageable size, then it wouldn't be so terrifying. For these writers the "costs of intimacy" have become too great and they have, every one of them, in a way, filed for a kind of literary personal bankruptcy.

The strongest argument one hears for this sort of fiction is that the very deficiencies in its literary qualities accurately reflect "life as it is lived." Life for most people, the common literary perception goes, is a small, cramped, and basically uninteresting affair. The best rebuttal to this is Susan Engberg's

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"In the Land of Plenty," originally published in *The Iowa Review* and collected in *The Pushcart Prize, IV, Best of the Small Presses.*[5] As far as the facts of the heroine's life go, she could have walked directly out of an Ann Beattie story. Margaret works at a health food store sifting beans and whole wheat flour. She's been abandoned by her hippieish, irresponsible husband, and worries constantly that her two daughters will catch cold if they don't get enough sleep. She feels thankful when she can go to bed at the same time as her children and sleep an extra three hours. The difference in this story is that Engberg, unlike Beattie and Munro, doesn't find despair to be the most comfortable alternative. She draws a stark picture of abandonment and its consequences, and she also subtly suggests the possibility of hope beneath her character's depression. Engberg's heroine, too, finds her language insufficient to express herself. She talks to her husband, who has suddenly reappeared for a surprise visit, and feels her life "diminishing." But as opposed to Carver, Wolff, and Robison, who use American vernacular condescendingly, or Beattie, whose vacuous monologues reflect her characters' empty heads, Engberg makes us feel the tragedy of a life that can't find expression—and even more, the miracle when that limitation, if only briefly, is overcome.

Two qualities above all separate Engberg's story from the *New Yorker* School. The first is the impulse, despite desperate confusion, to make moral choices: Margaret doesn't want to see her husband, and doesn't want him to see the children, but she feels powerless to stop him: "When men like Sloan chose to default in the care of their children, then there had to be certain forfeitures; there had to be." The second is her ability to think about and write about death —death that is connected to hurt and pain— and the ravages of death on the living. Carver writes about random, meaningless violence; for Beattie, Muntro, etc. one imagines that death is simply more of the same.

Engberg also writes beautifully of dream and memory; together with her plain but subtle dialogue she perfectly delineates the character of her heroine. The writers of the *New Yorker* School probably think of themselves, in their private lives, as having personalities and characters, even if they deny them to their fictional creations. Engberg is more generous.

Apart from the lapses already mentioned, and a few other inclusions, John Gardner's collection is one of the liveliest, most optimistic literary productions in several seasons. Gardner's ideas about "moral fiction" may not have served him very well when he was writing his own fiction, but as the editor of this collection they have apparently guided him toward choosing a number of truly original and satisfying stories, several of which mark their authors' fictional debuts.

Fred Licht's "Shelter the Pilgrim" is a portrait of religion and ambivalence, but surprisingly for this day and age it is the easy doubts of agnosticism that draw most of his skepticism. He begins with a reflection on the meaning and uses of charity: "To my grandfather, who was a ghetto Jew, charity was one of the exigencies of life. You breathed. You ate. You gave." To his parents, who prided themselves on being "advanced Jews," charity was a duty one performed at a distance. "To me, to my brother, and to my sister, charity is an equivocal institution designed to keep the poor in their place . . . We clearly know that charity is patronizing and shameful and the ugly fruit of uglier injustice. But we are somewhat dissatisfied with our knowledge." In 1937, the narrator is ten years old, and his father's business concerns require that the family move from Paris, where they were living, to Berlin. With only one or two deft lines of dialogue, Licht draws a convincing portrait of the father, a decent enough man, but whose general air of obliviousness to all around him makes such a move comprehensible. The mother is even more complacent. A rabbi, who visits them when they arrive in Berlin, harangues the parents on the danger of their situation, but to no

5 Pushcart Press, 539 pages, $19.95

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effect. And since they are intent on doing some good work for the community, he suggests they take in a retarded child, an *idiot savant,* as it turns out, from the ghetto orphanage. The mother agrees, and thereafter leaves the affair pretty much up to her son, who thus experiences the equivocal nature of charity first hand. The orphan is left behind when the family flees Germany and then escapes France just one step ahead of the Nazis. Looking back from adulthood, the narrator thinks less of guilt than the ironic fact that, as he has grown "temperamentally and intellectually into anti-religious attitudes," his need to believe has become more acute.

Nicholson Baker's "K. 590" is a deceptively light piece of fiction (Baker has actually published in *The New Yorker*). The story is a brief sketch of a student quartet at USC as it prepares for a competition in the only practice space available to them, the refreshment room of their Isla Vista apartment complex. Their playing is punctuated by the sound of coke cans plopping out of the vending machine and accompanied by the landlady's vacuum cleaner, which emits a steady hum on B-natural. Since the Mozart quartet they are working on is in F-major, this creates "a harmonic tension that must be resolved." The story is itself a tightly woven counterpoint of gentle harmonies, disharmonies, and resolutions: the landlady frets over the gobs of oil tar tracked onto her pink shag carpet from the nearby Santa Barbara beaches. At first she is lulled by the music and then saddened that such nice young men could get along so poorly. In fact the quartet is having a difficult practice: "David! Stop! I hate it when you turn on that fast machine vibrato: *eh-eh-eh-eh-eh-eh-eh.* No one else in this quartet uses Fritz Kreisler vibrato." Later, the quartet, reconciled, leaves with two girls just off the beach who have been lolling around the coke machine listening to the music. As they walk past the baroquely tacky fountain in the courtyard, the second violinist makes a wisecrack about California and this "shrine to chintz." "I know, I know," says the first violinist. "It was hard to take at first. But actually now I kind of like it. It's got its own integrity."

There are other fine contributions to this collection by James Ferry, Charles Baxter, R. E. Smith, William Hauptman, and Edith Milton. All of these stories are full of experience, of lives lived. One might even describe these stories as religious, in the sense that they try to find some meaningful order in that experience. Even when the search fails, as in Charles Baxter's "Harmony of the World," the attempt has been made and the loss is deeply felt.

It might seem obvious to say that literature is about experience, tautological even, if so much contemporary writing did not minimalize life to the point where no real experience can fit. The good news is that there is a lot of literature out there: *Pushcart* lists some six hundred small presses consulted, Gardner almost two hundred magazines and quarterlies that publish fiction. Fortunately, many authors seem happily innocent of the shrinking fashions of today's literary marketplace.

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Notebook

What was *Vanity Fair*?

by Deborah Trustman

Vanity Fair, edited by Frank Crowninshield, was published by Condé Nast in the years 1914-1936. According to legend, it was a brilliant and witty magazine—a compendium of the newest and best in American and European culture, and an intellectual showcase of sorts. With the new *Vanity Fair* coming this month, it may be worth looking back to see what the original magazine was really like.

It was certainly glittery and seductive, and it still dazzles. It was large, too, the size of the old *Life,* but more substantial, printed on thick paper with color covers by artists like Raoul Dufy and a caricaturist named Fish. Even the advertisements—for jewels from Tiffany's, for Packards, Daimlers and Pierce-Arrows, spats and suspenders, the French Line, the Cunard Line, the United States Line, Spud cigarettes and Lucky Strikes—retain their air of glamour half a century later. Crowninshield knew exactly what to give the audience that savored these advertisements. He let his middle-class readers glimpse a world more elegant than the one they inhabited and provided instruction for getting there. (According to *Vanity Fair*'s men's fashion column, "no tennis costume is complete unless, in addition to sweater and blazer, it contains a white muffler.") Pleasure was the keynote, and in the pages of *Vanity Fair* pleasure was closely identified with luxury.

Above all, it was a magazine of personalities, or, rather, names, and it is the names that constitute the heart of *Vanity Fair*'s legend. With its assiduous coverage of rising movie stars and declining nobility, *Vanity Fair* somehow succeeded in making them seem one and the same—images to be admired and emulated. "Movie stars," wrote Carl Van Vechten, "are the modern equivalent of the kings and queens of romance," and *Vanity Fair* was full of them—Garbo, with her hands brushing her hair off her face; the young Bette Davis, still an "ingenue from Boston"; then Norma Shearer and Irving Thalberg just after their marriage; and Gary Cooper in his first film.

Glamour was more easily captured in photographs than in words, however. *Vanity Fair*'s photographs—taken by Edward Steichen, Baron de Meyer, Man Ray, Charles Sheeler, and others—give us the very essence of the magazine: gorgeous, sophisticated, posed, glossy, and, for the most part, shallow. The best of these photographs become exquisite objects in themselves, and a few are even superb character studies. Yet *Vanity Fair* also covered politics, art, theater, sports, and books; it published fiction, satire, and poetry. If it did not discover any great talent, it quickly picked up on what was new and chic. Aldous Huxley, Sherwood Anderson, Harold Nicolson, Clarence Darrow, Walter Lippmann, Elinor Wylie, e. e. cummings, Thomas Mann, D. H. Lawrence—all contributed to the magazine.

But what did these celebrity writers produce for *Vanity Fair*? D. H. Lawrence wrote

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a piece suggesting that paintings should be destroyed after twenty or thirty years to make room for new ones: "Raphael now definitely bores us, after several centuries, and Michael Angelo begins to." In a piece called "The Extremely Moving Pictures," Thomas Mann talked about why he liked going to the movies. Art they are not, he insisted; they "work like onions and garlic" to produce tears. But he would, he admits, like to write them for the money. Sherwood Anderson's impression of New York begins: "O Mecca, O Dream of Youth, O Athens, Ohio, O Springfield, Illinois. Pitter-patter. Feet on pavements. Hundreds of miles of pavements. Subways. Buses on Fifth Avenue."

These fancy fillers leave the reader feeling teased and cheated. "I should like to examine more thoroughly my feelings about the motion pictures," Mann writes, "But there is no time now, for I am on my way to see a new film." Etc. Nor was the literary criticism exactly profound, either. The reviewer of *The Sound and the Fury,* for example, suggested that if Faulkner inverted the sections of this novel it would be a better book. And in all of the writing for *Vanity Fair* there are telltale signs that copy was heavily edited; a sameness in the syntax, a reliance on the repetition of words for ironic effect, a certain archness that tends to homogenize the prose style.

In politics, *Vanity Fair* tended to see the glamour in fascism and to ignore its dark side. Frank Crowninshield thought Mussolini one of the great men of the twentieth century, a supreme statesman with a sensitive soul, and he approved of Hitler as well, describing him in 1933 as "Handsome Adolph—A Law Unto Himself." What is disturbing is that these opinions are not aberrations; they are consistent with Crowninshield's other views. He admired order and smooth organization, and he believed everything would turn out for the best. The studio system in Hollywood made possible fantasy movie stars; Hitler and Mussolini organized their countries with fantasies of the past. A *Vanity Fair* cover from 1933 fea-

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tures a friendly caricature of Hitler by Garretto, with the swastika forming the dictator's arms and legs. It is hard today to look at that cover with clean eyes, without an instinctive horror, but no such reaction was intended at the time. The figure is cute, with skinny limbs like Mickey Mouse, sad cartoon eyes, and a soft mustache: the Führer reduced, disarmed; that image produces its own horror.

Hitler's intentions, of course, were becoming clear during the Thirties, and they could not be ignored, even in *Vanity Fair*. Yet when the magazine deals with information pointing to the truth, it does so hypothetically, as in "A Nazi Nightmare," published in 1934. The title does not refer to atrocities, but to the thesis of the book *Hitler Over Europe,* by Ernst Henri, which described, among other things, Hitler's forced labor camps. The reviewer, George Dangerfield, carefully qualifies his review. It is full of "if's"; Dangerfield cannot admit to believing what he has read. The book "professes to give the background and the future of Hitlerism; it is a compound of cold fact and ruthless speculation."

Already in 1932, *Vanity Fair* had sent a writer to interview Hitler, and George Slocum's description is terrifying: "His voice is harsh, rapid, metallic, almost incoherent. In another moment he will foam at the mouth. I recall the shell shock cases I have seen in war hospitals." He mentions Hitler's anti-Semitism, but the piece ends admiringly: "As a virtuoso in the subtle music of political oratory [Hitler] is almost sublime. In that, and in his passionate sincerity, lies all his power." The iron cross "may well be a symbol out of Teutonic mythology to bid [German youth] to rise and conquer."

Hitler had glamour and style, and Crowninshield made the mistake of believing in them, in the surface, not the evil substance, of the man. But glamour and style and fantasy—good, clean, laundered fantasy—sold Crowninshield's magazine. This fantasy undermined seriousness; it blinded. Crowninshield shared this willed innocence—a dream of gaiety and amusement—with many Americans, and when the country had to wake up, the magazine evaporated.

A current advertisement, proclaiming "the return of a legendary magazine," calls *Vanity Fair* "a magazine whose time has come . . . again." It will be interesting to see exactly what this means.

Among the philosophers

by Mark Lilla

The seventy-ninth annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) was held recently, as is traditional, in the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. This year's meeting was held in Baltimore at the new Convention Center, which is part of that city's recently completed harborside development—a copy of Boston's Quincy Market—of office towers, hotels, restaurants, and shops. The sixteen hundred professors and graduate students spent much of their free time between seminars and cocktail parties wandering through the boutiques and food stands in the green-roofed glass pavilions nearby.

When they returned to the Convention Center the scene looked remarkably similar, for there is nothing an academic convention resembles so much as a Middle-East bazaar. Special-interest groups are given space to hawk their wares—pamphlets, books, magazines, buttons, and now video tapes. This sort of trade was less oppressive than the large number of symposia offered by these organizations. Indeed, from the official program one could be forgiven for concluding that the APA convention is only an annual pavilion in which these groups congregate.

Three sorts of independent groups exist to offer symposia: specialized scholarly societies, pop-philosophy groups, and political organizations. The scholarly societies have long been a staple here and serve the important function of keeping the study of the history of philosophy alive within the APA. One could sit in on a discussion of Pico della Mirandola held by the Interna-

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tional Society for Neoplatonic Studies, or attend meetings of the Kierkegaard Society, the World Institute for Phenomenological Research, or the North American Nietzsche Society. If one was more interested in the state of the psyche or "how philosophy relates to everyday life," there was ample opportunity to attend meetings of the Personalistic Discussion Group, the Popular Culture Association, the Philosophical Society for the Study of Sport, or the Society for the Philosophical Study of the Paranormal. There were meetings, too, of the Society for the Study of Ethics and Animals, since "research" into the rights of plants and animals is becoming a subject of interest in some American philosophy departments.

And of course the obligatory political groups were there. The Society for the Philosophy of Sex and Love and the Society for Women in Philosophy held separate sessions, which devolved into discussions of "patriarchy" and related evils. The Radical Caucus met and announced a rise in national membership to sixty. Most active this year was Philosophers Against Nuclear Destruction of Rational Animals (PANDORA), distributing a nuclear freeze resolution and holding a "workshop on teaching arms race issues in a philosophy curriculum." As part of a workshop PANDORA distributed sample syllabi of the courses they had in mind, one of which—"Peace, World Order & War" (Phil. 103), now actually offered at a college in Massachusetts—required that students work "to diminish the likelihood of World War III and to promote World Peace." Activities suggested to meet that requirement included: "Set up and run a Peace Vigil," "Attend a Peace-related conference," "Promote a benefit concert, fair, lecture, dance, tupperware party, etc. for a given Peace-related group."

These "fringe" meetings are not new to philosophical conventions; indeed, they are part of almost any academic conference in the humanities or social sciences today. What was new about the APA convention this year was how unimportant these pop and political groups were. In contrast to the political science convention held in Denver this year, at which all the respectable meetings were run by independent groups, the serious intellectual attention in Baltimore was concentrated within a few symposia on the main program. All eyes, it seemed, were turned toward center stage, where the most distinguished association members were obliquely debating "the future of philosophy."

The most heavily attended sessions were devoted to debating two recent books that have made critiques of well established epistemological and moral doctrines in modern philosophy: Hilary Putnam's *Reason, Truth, and History* and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. Putnam was until very recently one of the truly indefatigable defenders of philosophical realism. At the convention he explained his conversion to the quite different views expounded in his latest book. The book itself opposes the metaphysical view underlying the analytic turn in Anglo-American philosophy in this century. Putnam is quite explicit in making the connection between his new philosophical views and related issues in the realms of science, morals, and politics. There was real excitement in the air, as there was at the session devoted to MacIntyre's book. Alasdair MacIntyre has always been a gadfly in American (and British) philosophical circles, but in *After Virtue* he showed himself to be much more than that. He produced a critical history of modern Western moral philosophy and practice and a program for refocusing philosophy on the question of virtue in moral life. MacIntyre's combination of wit and broad learning made for a very lively session in which the intellectual limitations of analytic moral philosophy, and of its proponents, were made excruciatingly plain.

There are problems with both of these books, to be sure, but the very fact that philosophy professors can again write about larger social and intellectual questions and have their work engaged by so many of their colleagues is a promising sign that university philosophy is undergoing the kind of

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thorough self-criticism that is necessary (but not sufficient) for it to overcome the damage done by decades of analytic torpor. It would not be inaccurate to describe the atmosphere at this convention as open and speculative. William J. Bennett, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, presented a well-received paper with George Sher on moral education; Paul de Man and Raymond Geuss debated Hegel's aesthetics; and Adolf Grünbaum's presidential address concerned the scientific status of Freudian psychoanalysis. All these sessions were serious, demanding, and not at all pedantic or "logic-chopping"—indeed, they diverged from every stereotyped notion of contemporary philosophy.

So one could have spent all one's time with the pop and political groups, or sat in only on discussions such as "Is Rationality Extensional?" and "Authenticity is not a Real Predicate." But there was a unity to the convention which transcended these differences. The reason is that the popularizers and the ideologues simply never captured the mainstream of academic philosophy—as they have in so many other disciplines—and there remains a common language and corpus of knowledge. The irony may be that while the analytic turn in post-war American philosophy drove it to a marginal position in American intellectual life, it also managed to keep the discipline relatively free of popularization and politicization, and allowed it to maintain fairly rigorous, if nonetheless misguided, standards. Somehow, most philosophy departments escaped the general academic devastation of the past few decades.

Not that all is fine in American philosophy today. The fringe groups are a problem, as they are everywhere in the academy; a tight job market has led to a lot of foolish inquiry by tenure-hungry professors; and many minds remain closed to Continental writing. Yet considered as a whole, university philosophy is in a good position to become one of the more important intellectual disciplines in the coming decade. This may be little solace, but in the contemporary academy one takes what one can.

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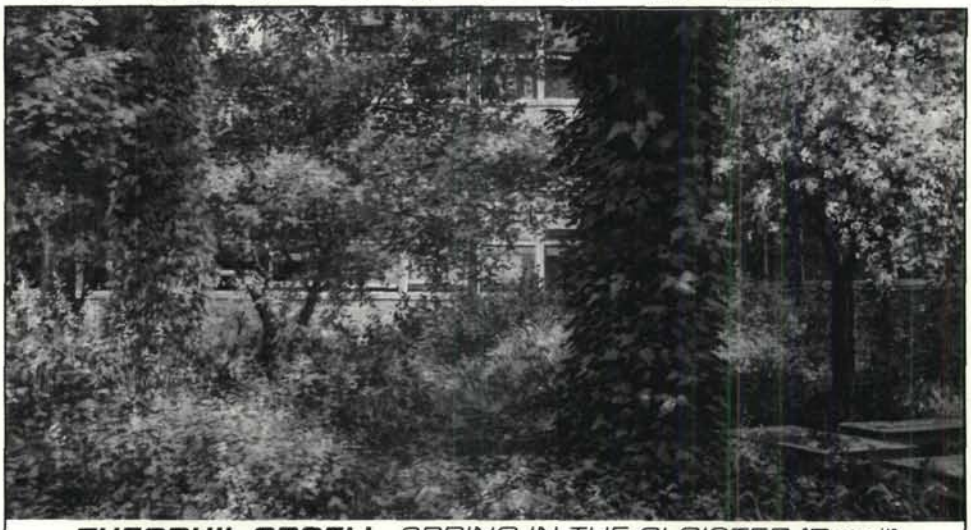

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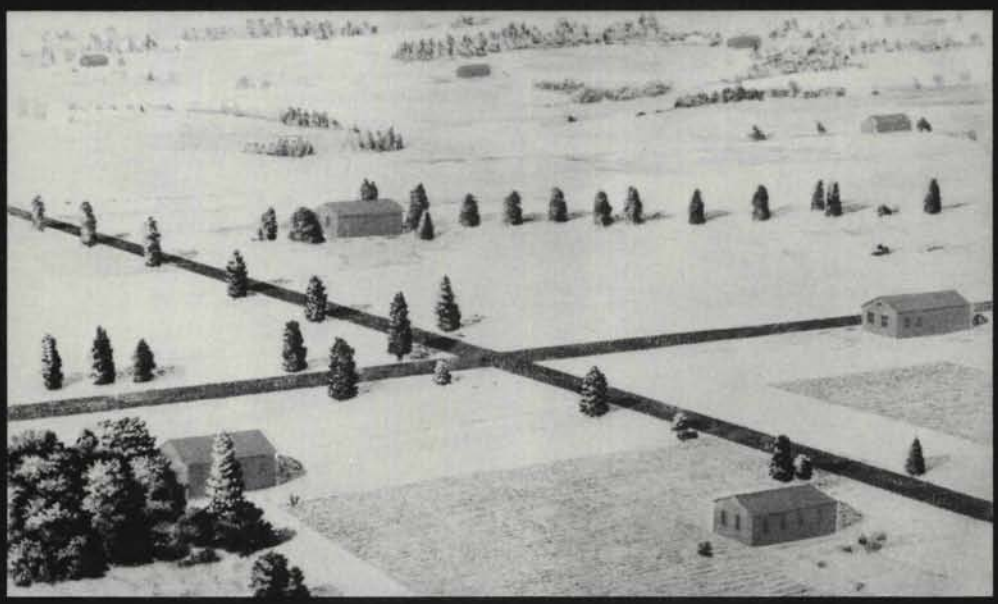

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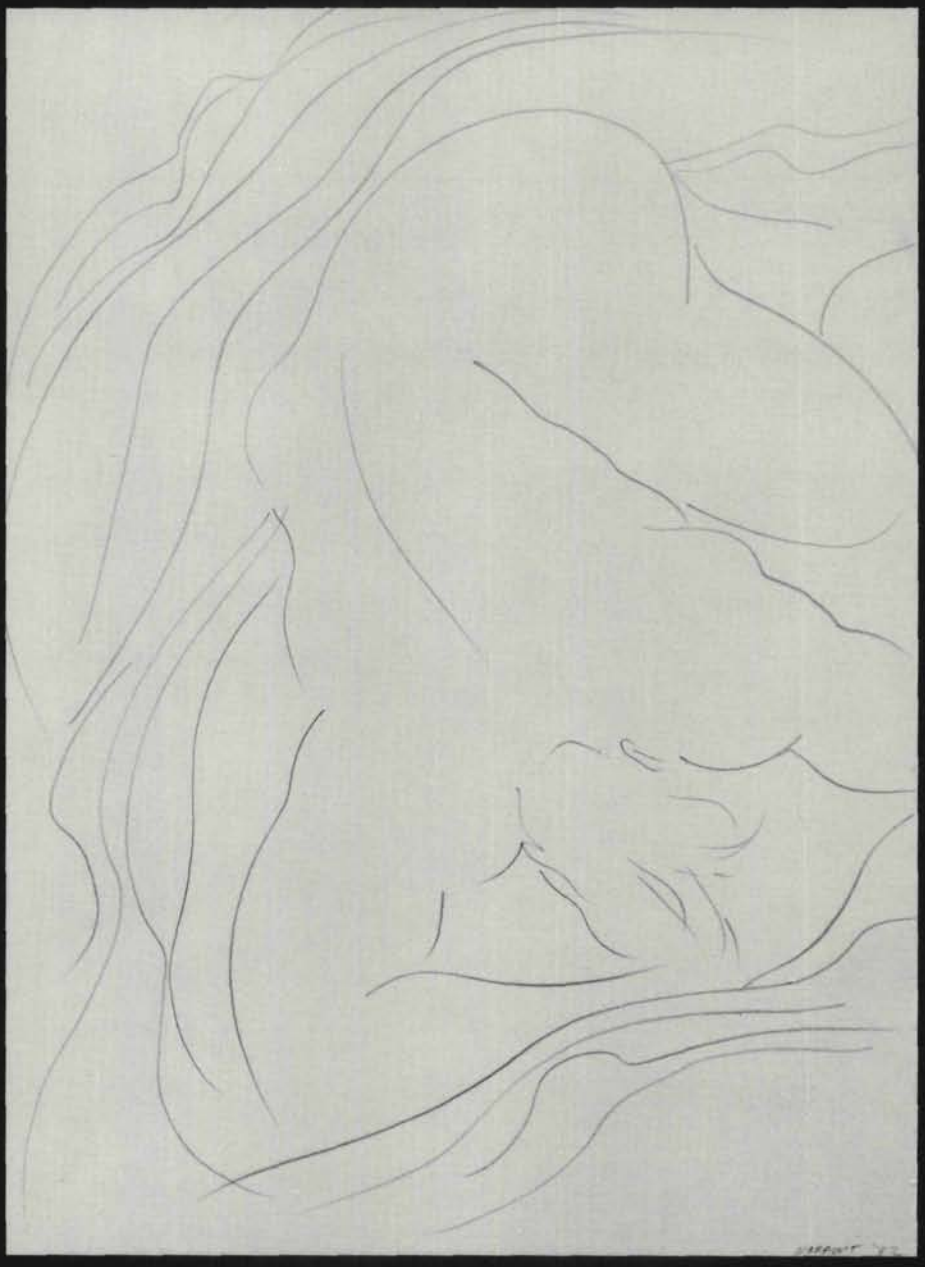

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